

René Jean-Paul Dewil

# **The City of Ghent**

## **1345 - 1379**

Ghent in the fourteenth century

# **The Scourge**

**Copyright Clause**

Copyright © René Jean-Paul Dewil 2014

René Jean-Paul Dewil is identified as the sole author of this work. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be altered without the written permission of the author.

The book may be copied in electronic or other forms for personal use only. It may not be printed, introduced in any retrieval system, electronic or otherwise, photocopied or otherwise recorded without the prior written permission of the author.

The only system where the e-book may be retrieved from is the Internet website [www.theartofpainting.be](http://www.theartofpainting.be), which holds the only and original text acknowledged by the author.

This publication remains under copyright.

‘The City- the Scourge’ is a work of fiction. Except for the names of the van Artevelde family and of the kings, popes, dukes and counts, all the other names that have been used and the characters of the novel are only the result of the imagination of the author. Any resemblance with real people, existing or dead, is purely coincidental.

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	3
The Characters.....	5
Chapter 1. The Years after van Artevelde’s Death. Autumn 1345 – Spring 1348.....	10
The van Arteveldes.....	10
The Pharaïldis Policy .....	12
The Low Countries and Crécy .....	27
Count Louis of Male .....	32
Chapter 2. The Plague in Ghent. Spring 1348 – Autumn 1349 .....	55
Heyla de Smet .....	55
Bad Tidings .....	70
Good Tuesday .....	81
The Scourge.....	95
Chapter 3. After the Plague. Winter 1349 – Autumn 1351 .....	107
After the Wave .....	107
The Pharaïldis Evolution.....	121
Terhagen.....	130
Quintine Denout’s Story.....	148
Chapter 4. The French Inheritance. Spring 1351 – Winter 1356 .....	161
Dark Clouds gathering .....	161
The Terhagen Mystery .....	174
Provins.....	187
Bad Wednesday at Scheut .....	205
Chapter 5. The troubled Times. Spring 1357 – Winter 1370.....	219
Flanders and France .....	219
The second Outbreak of the Plague.....	228
The Fire in Ghent .....	245
The Third Wave .....	255

Chapter 6. The Transition Years. Spring 1370 – Autumn 1379 .....	267
A domestic Quarrel .....	267
The Strike and the Fourth Wave .....	276
The War in France and the Great Schism .....	286
Epilogue .....	293
Author's Notes .....	298

## The Characters

### The Vresele family

Gerolf Vresele	(1285-1349)	Fremineuren monk.
Gillis Vresele	(1293-1360)	brother of Gerolf.
Avezoete Wulslager	(1295-1349)	wife of Gillis Vresele.
Heinric Vresele	(1325-1390)	son of Gillis
Marie Vresele	(1312-1388)	daughter of Gillis, married in 1332 to John de Smet.
Evrard Vresele	(1320-1387)	son of Gillis, monk.
Boudin Vresele	(1316-1395)	son of Gillis Vresele, trader Married 1350 to Margaret van Westvelde
Jehan Terhagen	(1319-1390)	adopted son of Gillis Vresele, married in 1350 to Wivine Denout

#### *Children of Jehan Terhagen and Quintine Denout:*

Ser William Vresele van Ter Hage de Vitry	(1352-1417)
Ver Kerstin Vresele van Ter Hage de Vitry	(1353-1420)
Ver Selie Vresele van Ter Hage de Vitry	(1355-1361)

#### *Children of Boudin Vresele and Margaret van Westvelde:*

Gillis Vresele the Younger	(1350-1405)
Agneete Vresele	(1351-1407)

### The de Smet family

Wouter de Smet	(1280-1348)	smith.
Lijsbetten Mutaert	(1283-1349)	wife of Wouter de Smet
Veerle de Smet	(1308-1349)	daughter of Wouter, married in 1329 to William van Lake.
John de Smet	(1310-1395)	goldsmith, son of Wouter, married to Marie Vresele in 1332.
Heyla de Smet	(1333-1385)	daughter of John de Smet
Wouter de Smet the Younger	(1335-1382)	son of John de Smet, goldsmith.
Amelberga van Dorme	(1336-1390)	wife of Wouter de Smet the Younger, married 1357.

#### *Children of Wouter de Smet the Younger and Amalberga van Dorme:*

John de Smet the Younger	(1358-1421)
Alise de Smet	(1360-1428)

#### *Children of Heyla de Smet with Count Louis van Male:*

Beatrise of Flanders	(1350-1410)
Robert Bastard of Flanders	(1352-1423)
Johanna of Flanders	(1355-1361)
Margaret of Flanders	(1361-1420)
Baldwin Bastard of Flanders	(1370-1432)

**The van Lake Family**

Raes van Lake the Elder (1280-1349)	weaver
Zwane Bentijn (1285-1349)	wife of Raes van Lake, married 1304.
Raes van Lake the Younger (1310-1349)	son of Raes the Elder
Mechtild van Lens (1311-1349)	wife of Raes van Lake the Younger, married 1330.
William van Lake (1311-1370)	weaver, draper, son of Raes the Elder.
Veerle de Smet (1308-1349)	wife of William van Lake, married in 1329.
Alise van Lake (1331-1385)	daughter of William, married 1350 to Clais de Hert
Avezoete van Lake (1332-1390)	daughter of Raes the Younger, draper, married 1351 to Martin Denout.
Boudin van Lake (1340-1382)	son of Raes the Younger, weaver, Married to Agte Homberg
Agte Homberg (1344-1390)	wife of Boudin van Lake, married 1362.

*Children of Boudin van Lake and Agte Homberg:*

Raes van Lake (1363-1430)
Zoetin van Lake (1365-1440)

**The Denout family**

John Denout (1283-1349)	fuller.
Selie Scivaels (1284-1349)	wife of John Denout.
Pieter Denout (1303-1365)	fuller, son of John.
Martin Denout (1330-1382)	fuller, son of Pieter, married to Avezoete van Lake.
Wivine Denout (1331-1391)	daughter of Pieter Denout, twin of Quintine.
Quintine Denout (1331-1365)	daughter of Pieter Denout, twin of Wivine.

*Children of Martin Denout and Avezoete van Lake:*

John Denout the Younger (1353-1422)
Selie Denout the Younger (1355-1425)

**The de Hert family**

Arnout de Hert (1279-1349)	shipper
Marie Scivaels (1280-1352)	wife of Arnout de Hert, sister of Selie Scivaels
John de Hert (1297-1361)	shipper, son of Arnout de Hert, Married to Beatrise van Vaernewijc
Beatrise van Vaernewijc (1300-1366)	wife of John de Hert, married 1325
Nete de Hert (1298-1370)	daughter of Arnout de Hert
Kerstin de Hert (1309-1370)	daughter of Arnout de Hert, married 1331 to Pieter Denout
Clais de Hert (1332-1382)	son of John de Hert, married to Alise van Lake 1350

*Children of Clais de Hert and Alise van Lake:*

Arnout de Hert the Younger (1351-1405)
--

Beatrise de Hert (1353-1361)  
Lieve de Hert (1355-1427)

### Other characters

#### *The people of Old Terhagen:*

Lauwers Christiaens	(1310-1365)	owner of a brickyard near Axel
Lammin Metsers	(1308-1375)	a master mason of Axel
Geert van Dorp	(1302-1361)	Jehan Terhagen's steward at Old Terhagen
Albin van Dorp	(1325-1390)	son of Geert van Dorp, steward at Old Terhagen
Marie van Axel	(1330-1392)	wife of Albin van Dorp

#### *The people of new Terhagen:*

Ywen de Wilde	(1314-1375)	a servant at New Terhagen of Jehan Terhagen
Kateline Dankers	(1319-1385)	Ywen de Wilde's wife and cook at New Terhagen
Ruebin de Wilde:	(1345-1402)	son of Ywen de Wilde
Kerstiaen de Wilde	(1344-1410)	son of Ywen de Wilde
Everdey de Handscoemakere	(1319-1390)	Jehan Terhagen's guard at New Terhagen
Marie Colpaert	(1322-1392)	wife of Everdey de Handscoemakere
Arent de Handscoemakere	(1343-1409)	son of Everdey
Lieve de Handscoemakere	(1344-1415)	daughter of Everdey
Mathis van Noortkerke	(1324-1395)	Jehan Terhagen's guard at New Terhagen
Anna de Cleyne	(1326-1398)	wife of Mathis van Noortkerke
Roegier van Noortkerke	(1346-1420)	son of Mathis
Zeger van Noortkerke	(1347-1425)	son of Mathis
Greet van Noortkerke	(1349-1430)	daughter of Mathis

## The feudal Lords

Note: the dates stated are dates of reign, unless otherwise indicated.

### Kings of England:

Edward III (1327–1377), married to Philippa of Hainault.

Richard II (1377–1399), married to (1) Anne of Bohemia and (2) Isabella of Valois.

Henry IV (1399-1413) Bolingbroke, son of John of Gaunt, married to (1) Mary de Bohun (1380) and (2) Joanna of Navarre (1403).

### Kings of France:

Philip VI of Valois the Fortunate – Philippe VI le Fortuné (1328-1350), grandson of Philip III, married to (1) Joan the Lame of Burgundy and (2) to Agnes of France.

John II the Good – Jean II le Bon (1350-1364), married to Bonne of Bohemia.

Charles V the Wise – Charles V le Sage (1364-1380), married to Joan of Bourbon.

Charles VI the Beloved the Mad – Charles VI le Bienaimé le Fol (1380-1422), married to Isabeau of Bavaria.

### Counts of Flanders:

Louis I of Nevers – Lodewijk van Nevers (1322-1346), grandson of Robert III, married to (1) Margaret of France and (2) to Joan II Countess of Burgundy.

Louis II of Male – Lodewijk van Male (1346-1384), married Margaret of Brabant.

Margaret III of Flanders (b. 1350, r. 1384-1405) – daughter of Louis of Male, married (1) in 1357 to Philip of Rouvre, Count of Burgundy (b. 1346) from which she was widowed in 1361; then married (2) in 1369 to Philip the Bold (r. 1363-1404), Duke of Burgundy, son of King John II of France.

### Popes

Clement VI (1342-1352): at Avignon - Pierre Roger

Innocent VI (1352-1362): at Avignon - Étienne Aubert

Urban V (1362-1370): at Avignon - Guillaume de Grimoard

Gregory XI (1370-1378): at Avignon - Pierre Roger de Beaufort

Urban VI (1378-1389): papal schism, Rome - Bartolomeo Prignano

Clement VII (1378-1394): papal schism, Avignon - Robert of Geneva

Boniface IX (1389-1404): papal schism, Rome – Pietro Tomacelli

Benedict XIII (1394-1424): antipope, papal schism, Avignon - Pedro Martínez de Luna y Pérez de Gotor

### Kings of Germany and Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire:

Lewis IV – Ludwig IV der Bayer (Lewis of Bavaria) von Wittelsbach (1314-1347): Holy Roman Emperor, married to (1) Beatrix Swidnicka and (2) to Margaret of Holland.

Frederick the Fair – Friedrich der Schöne von Habsburg (1314-1325): rival king to Louis IV, married to Isabella of Aragon.  
 Charles IV – Karl IV von Luxemburg (1346-1378): Holy Roman Emperor, married to (1) Blanche of Valois, (2) to Anna of Bavaria (3) to Anna von Schweidnitz and (4) to Elizabeth of Pomerania  
 Günther von Schwarzburg (Jan 1349 – May 1349): rival king to Charles IV.  
 Wenceslaus – Wenzel von Luxemburg (1376-1400): deposed as German King in 1400, continued to rule as King of Bohemia, married to (1) Joanna of Bavaria and (2) Sophia of Bavaria

### **Dukes of Brabant, Lothier and Limburg:**

John III (1312–1355): married to Marie d'Évreux.  
 Joanna (1355–1406): married (1) to William IV, Count of Holland and (2) to Wenceslaus I Duke of Luxemburg

### **Counts of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland**

William IV of Hainault (1337-1345): married to Joanna Duchess of Brabant  
 Margaret II of Hainault (1345-1356): married to Ludwig IV of Bavaria, German Emperor  
 William V of Wittelsbach, Duke of Bavaria-Straubing (1356-1388): married to Mathilda or Maud of Lancaster  
 Albert I of Wittelsbach, Duke of Bavaria-Straubing (1388-1407): married to (1) Margaret of Brieg and (2) to Margaret of Cleves

### **Counts and Dukes of Guelders**

Reginald II the Fat Wassenberg – Reinoud II de Dikke (1343–1361): first time,  
 Eleanor regent (1343–1344): daughter of King Edward II of England, wife of Reginald II  
 Edward I (1361–1371): brother of Reginald III  
 Reginald II the fat of Wassenberg (1371): second time  
 Matilde of Guelders (1371–1379): and John II, Count of Blois (d. 1381), her third husband  
 Maria of Guelders (1371–1379): and William II, Duke of Jülich (d. 1393), her husband.  
 She disputed the Duchy of Guelders with her sister Matilde.  
 William I of Jülich-Hengebach (1379–1402): son of Maria and William II, Duke of Guelders and Duke of Jülich. Married to Catherine of Bavaria. See William III of Jülich

### **Counts of Jülich**

William V (1328-1361): margrave as from 1336, then duke from 1356 as William I.  
 William II (1362-1393): married in 1362 to Maria of Guelders, daughter of Reginald II of Guelders.  
 William III (1393–1402): also Duke of Guelders since 1377.

## Chapter 1. The Years after van Artevelde's Death. Autumn 1345 – Spring 1348.

### The van Artevelde

The men of the Pharaïldis group, the men of the families of Vresele, de Smet, van Lake, Denout and de Hert, heard of the assassination of James van Artevelde with consternation. They were dumbfounded by shock, but submitted to resignation by too harsh fate. They conferred, at first only person to person, as if they feared of showing their emotions publicly, then they felt outraged such an ignominious, cool-blooded murder on a man who had renounced to all public offices could have happened in Ghent, to one of their friends.

Raes van Lake brought the news to Wouter de Smet and later in the day to John Denout. Wouter ran to the shipper Arnout de Hert, whereas Raes continued his way back to the *Kalanderberg* to warn Gillis Vresele. Gillis arrived only late at home from a voyage to Brussels, when he heard the bad news.

I, Jehan Terhagen, had accompanied Gillis Vresele to Brabant, so I learned the terrible fate of James at the same time as Gillis. My thoughts went to the wife and children of James van Artevelde. Most of these, I knew, were already in England by then, for James had preferred sending Catherine de Coster and the children to the island, to safety, with most of his possessions. How about James's other, closest family? When I went over the list of next-of-kin of James van Artevelde, wondering who we should help, I quickly decided none of them ran any danger of being caught by the intransigent vengeance of Gerard Denijs. The family of James we knew of, would be safe.

James van Artevelde had three daughters, two with his first wife Agneete, and one with Catherine de Coster, his second wife.

James's eldest daughter, the first child of Agneete Vresele, had married the quiet Godfrey de Roede. The couple stayed in one of the houses of the van Artevelde complex in the *Kalanderberg*. They lived a calm life among family and friends, bakers and brewers mostly, who lived close to them. Godfrey traded in wool. The horde of excited weavers of Gerard Denijs had not forced the doors of their house. The weavers probably did not even know a daughter of James lived there, or Godfrey had been protected, for Godfrey was associated with the weavers. In 1348, he opposed the fullers of Ghent during the disturbances of that year for which act or revolt he had been banished from the town. He left Ghent with his family, and we never really heard of him thereafter.

The second daughter, Margaret, was happily married to Lord Walter of Erpe. The bloodthirsty group of Gerard Denijs would have been beaten off by the walls of the castle of Erpe, and nobody would have dared insulting the Lord of Erpe. Walter was a natural ally of the counts of Flanders, but he was a man who minded his own business, cared for his family and was known to play no role whatsoever in the politics of Ghent. He managed his lands and traded, was respected by all who knew him, enjoyed the protection of the court of the count, and would fight for his beloved wife to the end. He was a mountain of respectability, a courageous knight. Nobody harassed him or his family. Nobody would have dared attack the family, for the lord of Erpe was also known to brandish the sword fiercely!

The youngest daughter, Catherine, named after her mother, was a mere four years old. She lived in England, with her mother. Many years later, she married a man called John de Scoteleere, who was not worth much as a person and even less as a trader. Still, John was not a bad man and he cared for his wife. He lost more money from Catherine's estate than he gained. He proved totally inoffensive in the politics of Ghent.

James van Artevelde had also three sons, of which equally two by Agneete and one by Catherine.

The eldest son, John, was only about sixteen years old at the death of his father. He too accompanied Catherine de Coster to England. John was to stay in England for quite a while, returned to Gent around 1350 and later married the noble lady of Drongen. He was widowed rather rapidly, re-married and was exiled again. He returned quickly from that second exile, receiving the count's grace. John's daughter Catherine, daughter from his first wedding, succeeded upon her mother as Lady of Drongen. Much later, she would marry the knight Ser Daniel van Haelwijn and have a fine family by him.

James the Younger, slightly younger than John, accompanied his brother and his mother to England. He too played no significant role in Ghent, in nothing comparable to his illustrious father, except in extending his business fortune. The members of the Pharaïldis families occasionally traded with him, but avoided being connected to him in any other way.

John and James the Younger inherited estates north of Ghent in the Four Crafts and along the west side of the Scheldt. They diked polders, dried out the lands, held cattle, bought and sold land in the regions of Baasrode, Bornem and Weert, where also the new husband of their stepmother, Ser Zeger de Bornaige, held lands. Also the abbots of Saint Bavo of Ghent were active in that region. John died in 1365 and James the Younger in 1370. Both were murdered. James the younger was killed during a dispute over polder lands near Weert by members of the de Mey, van Merlaer and Panneberch families, families which also had vested interests in polders of the area. These malevolent families of Ghent would also come to harass me, Jehan Terhagen, but I shook them off like fleas on a lamb's fleece.

We lost sight of Philip for quite a while, of James van Artevelde's first and only son by Catherine de Coster. He did not return with his mother after a few months of exile. The Pharaïldis men had heard James mention a few words about Philip being dedicated to the church, according to a wish of his mother. They supposed Philip remained in England to be educated to the priesthood. He returned to Ghent in the 1350's, was a landowner and a trader, hence a member of the smaller guilds. We only really heard of him much, much later, after his brothers John and James the Younger had been killed, and when he had inherited most of the former van Artevelde properties. He would come to prominence one day, be a great friend of Heinric Vresele, but that is another story.

Catherine de Coster returned to Ghent quite soon after the death of her husband. The van Artevelde estates had not been confiscated, and also not her own. She had the means to live quietly, quite at ease. A few years later, she married the knight Ser Zeger de Bornaige, who was a follower of the Count, later bailiff of the quarter of Ieper for Count Louis of Male. She did not seek any political role in Flanders, nor did her husband.

We also did not keep contact with James's brothers. Francis van Artevelde remained living in Bruges. He was a well-known alderman and trader there. His daughter Elisabeth married and returned to Ghent, where she owned property.

William van Artevelde, the water-count, would be banished from Ghent several times to come. He remained turbulent and ebullient, but occupied no influential position in Ghent after the death of his brother. Neither did the other brother we knew of, John van Artevelde.

The Pharaïldis men told me there was no reason why they should ask one or other van Artevelde man to replace James in their group. They had not been close to Catherine de Coster, who, quite naturally, preferred the company of men of her own standing, of knights and of families of the old knight-*poorters*. Catherine wandered off from her former husband's friends. She did not seek contact with the Vreseles or with the van Lakes. We lost sight of her.

The Pharaïldis men remained in shock for several months before they were able to talk together about the death of James. I surmised the atmosphere was as if we all felt like orphans of the leader, and in some or other way responsible for his death. The Pharaïldis men had conferred together and had almost always reported to James van Artevelde, used him as their yardstick in business and as the leader in their views of politics, even when they did not agree with him. I knew what it meant to be an orphan, without a guide or without somebody to look up to or to contest. We had to re-establish some form of leadership in our group. That role befell on Gillis Vresele.

The Pharaïldis group did not meet for several months. Nobody in Ghent connected them directly to the van Arteveldes, and Ghent too remained stunned and a little ashamed of what had happened with their one-time saviour.

When Gerard Denijs disbanded his armed men, calm returned rapidly in our town. Nobody mentioned James van Artevelde anymore for a long, long time. Gerard Denijs' power dwindled rapidly, though. He wore the stigmata of the nefarious man on him. The better aldermen of the old lineages avoided him. He could not accomplish much, his authority was ostentatiously ignored. Denijs only remained dean of the weavers until February of 1347. That year also the other deans were replaced, after a brief visit in Ghent by Count Louis of Male. Dean John van de Velde left his function in April and Lievin van Veurne in August. The weavers continued to dominate the government of the town, though the fullers were never ousted out of their official functions.

The weavers would have to relent most of their power once more in January of 1349, after yet another clash between the guilds on 'Good Tuesday', which revenged the former 'Bad Monday' battle.

## The Pharaïldis Policy

The Pharaïldis men held their first formal meeting at the end of September of 1345. Such a long time had to pass before they dared face the death of James van Artevelde and their own involvement in the events which ended so tragically.

It was also on a sad day the men met in the hall of Raes van Lake's house in the *Brabantstraat*, a street they all entered with apprehension. The sky was closed and grey too early in the season. Low and heavy clouds hung menacingly above them and a drizzling rain forced them to walk fast. Wind gusts tore at their woollen cloaks. Nobody would have recognised them in the *Brabantstraat* for they had drawn their large hoods far over their

heads. One might have guessed they were not in the best of moods, for they walked with heads bowed, eyes on the slippery cobbles and on the rivulets of water running often in thick layers along the fronts of the houses. They tried to remain in the middle of the roads, and so avoid the streams of the now pelting rain that fell thicker from the roofs, which were more than in other streets of the *kuipe* of Ghent covered with tiles rather than with thatch. The *Brabantstraat* was a street of well-to-do traders and craftsmen, a street in one of the better quarters of town and even of the centre of Ghent.

The front door to the van Lake house was unlocked, as was usual for a Pharaïldis meeting. The men knocked on the panel but pushed open the door without further warning or waiting for one of the van Lake family to open. Very few other people walked in the *Brabantstraat* on the dreary afternoon, in the miserable weather of autumn. The economic activity of numerous carts being shuffled forward or of ambulant sellers shouting their trade had ceased.

The men who entered the luxuriously decorated large hall of Raes van Lake were Gillis Vresele, fifty-two, and his sons Boudin, nineteen, and I, Jehan, twenty-six. We were traders in cloth and in everything else we could think of.

Wouter de Smet, sixty-five, also entered, accompanied by son John, thirty-five. They were goldsmiths, blacksmiths and dealers in gold and silver, money-changers of lately.

Raes van Lake the Elder, sixty-five too, presided. His sons Raes the Younger, thirty-five and William, thirty-four, sat opposite him at the long, oak table in the warmed hall. Raes the Elder once every while placed another log in the hearth to keep the fire intense and warm our bones. The van Lakes were mainly cloth-traders and weavers, though they did not exercise their original craft of weaving anymore. They had the actual processes of weaving and fulling and preparing cloth being executed by other weavers, the best fullers, dyers and so on, merely ordering the quality standards their customers demanded of them to be guaranteed.

The best friend of Raes the Elder was his fuller, John Denout, sixty-two and a Pharaïldis man too. He arrived together with his son Pieter, forty-two. The Denout were also only fullers in name. They still received many orders for fulling, which they offered in their turn to other fullers of Ghent, but had this work realised according their own quality demands. They owned several fulling mills in town, along the Leie, and they had equally begun trading in cloth and in fullers' clays.

The more exotic men present, always sunburnt and smiling optimism in autumn as in spring, were the shippers Arnout de Hert, sixty-six, and John de Hert, forty-eight, his son. They commanded ships still, though Arnout had more or less retired as ship-captain, refusing to admit he grew too old for the craft, and being more an owner of ships than a captain. He managed his ever-growing fleet of river-boats and seagoing cogs. His ships sailed from Douai to Antwerp over Ghent, and from Ghent over the Lieve Canal to the sea-port of Sluis near Bruges, where his sea-going vessels, sturdy, ugly, but very efficient cogs transported goods and materials as far as Bordeaux in the south and Hamburg, Lübeck and Danzig in the north.

The men negligently threw off their cloaks before entering the hall, knowing the women of the van Lake family would take care of them, dry them in the kitchen, and then they shook hands with Raes the Elder. They went to sit at the table, sinking in the chairs with a sigh of pleasure, turning their hands to the heat of the fire.

The elder men sat together, the patriarchs Raes, Wouter, Gillis, Arnout and John. The others, more talkative, louder, more ready for a laugh and a tap on shoulders, sat at the other end.

After a short period of small talk, the van Lake women, Raes's wife Zwane, Raes the Younger's wife Mechtild and William's wife Veerle – who was also a de Smet daughter, - brought in cups and jugs of sweet, white wine. This wine the Pharaïldis men called Raes's

pride! The conversations dropped as the men drank. They appreciated the wine by smacking their lips, and sighing over such sweet goodness God had provided for. Then, Raes scraped his throat, demanding attention of all. He began his short speech of introduction.

‘My dear friends, we must have a few thoughts for our other friend, the only one who could not be with us this evening, James van Artevelde. James died too soon, ignominiously murdered. He was a great man, who saved our town from misery. He gave us back our wool so that our industry could flourish once more. He succeeded in guarding our neutrality in the conflict between the kings of France and England until the French king and our French-minded count betrayed every charter they ever signed with us. Then, when James realised how treacherous these two men could prove, he sided with King Edward of England, who was also his true friend. We warned him he committed himself too openly to England in his support for Edward, but who are we to judge and blame him for a friendship that was honest, noble and true? James led the three members of Flanders, our three great cities and their quarters, against a greedy, unscrupulous count. The count would have ruined his territories, thrown into abject shame thousands of people, including us all, for a smile and a nod of the French royal court. Much more significantly for us, James relentlessly fought to force the principle of free trade among the peoples and counties of our lands on the kings, dukes and counts of our neighbours. This has allowed us and Ghent and entire Flanders, to prosper.’

Raes sighed, continued, ‘life is as it is, sad and dangerous. What else are we men but guards shielding our families from the vagaries of life? We cannot change the fact that the nobles in our country are men who look only to their own interests, who therefore give battle among each other, destroy each other’s lands, villages and cities. We, *poorters* of Ghent, escaped the ordeals and dangers of the countryside to unite within city walls and defend ourselves against their greed and wrath. The nature of those men is vile, and will also remain so for many generations to come. Aware of their vanity, haughtiness and greed, we have tried - successfully I have to add -, to live quietly and to prosper by hard effort of work and mind. We may have sinned by pushing our friend James van Artevelde to the public forefront, into the turmoil of international politics, exposed him to the dangers and seductions of power. We must repent for that. James did our work so that we were allowed to hide in the shadows and grow rich. On behalf of us all, I asked the nuns of the Bijloke convent to light a perpetual candle. The candle will give light for eternity on the altar of the Bijloke Church in honour of James van Artevelde. The flame in the church will keep the memory of James alight. The nuns know who paid, and why, but they will not reveal who asked to illuminate the face of the Virgin on the altar of the first side-chapel. Similarly, for five years to come, two holy masses will be sung each month in the Church of Saint John, celebrated by three priests. We pray thus for God and Our Lady to forgive us our sins. May the soul of James van Artevelde forever dwell at the side of God and His saints.’

Raes van Lake paused a while. The heads sank to breasts. The men thought of James van Artevelde, sighed, then looked back at Raes the Elder, brought their cups to their faces and drank to the memory of their deceased friend.

‘Things done cannot be undone,’ Raes continued solemnly. ‘Time cannot be turned backwards. We must look to the future. The departure for a better world of James van Artevelde must not alter the ties of friendship among the families of our group. We have been made poorer by the loss of a friend, but we should not feel defeated. I hope that we, men of the Pharaïldis group, will continue working together. I sincerely hope we will continue discussing joint ventures. We can as yet organise regular meetings, make our fortunes work together, join our minds, and in doing so multiply our profits. We have staked our fortunes on

our grouping of interests in the past, and that scheme has proven successful. We work on our private ventures, but we have this year decided in common on six major transports of wine and spices, and on loads of powders to colour cloth, as well as for more than ten transports of grain from Picardy. Our money-changing and loaning initiatives have brought us huge profits. We deal increasingly together in beer and ale from and to Brabant and Hainault. This has allowed us gradually to forge new relations with our neighbours of far and we can now feel confident in our partners of those lands. We must continue this kind of trade and sharing of funds. We have the means to continue to do so. I remind you that in all those cases of trade, our profits have been extraordinarily high. We have doubled, and in some ventures even tripled our investments. More and more, I have to tell you, I wonder what we are going to do with the money we accumulated, for as we accumulate, our profits soar even more and our funds grow dazzlingly high. We have now enough money to count all of our children, our daughters included, among the wealthiest *poorters* of Ghent.'

Raes the Elder paused and drank.

He continued, 'Ghent, my friends, has proven for us a haven of peace. No longer do we have to fear for our lives. Ghent is so strong, so powerful, that no other human power on earth would dare to throw armies against us. James van Artevelde has secured alliances of mutual defence with the other cities of Flanders, which guarantee us peace as long as we and our aldermen are not complete fools, and we will, of course, see to it they remain alert.'

Raes van Lake let his words sink in. The men smiled.

He then announced, 'I shall stop talking now, however. My throat is dry. Gillis Vresele has something important to add!'

Gillis Vresele stood from his chair, thanked Raes the Elder, and then he too began to speak about what lay on his mind.

'Yes, my friends, our mutual enterprises in trade have brought us a grand share of prosperity. We have increasingly invested also in land, though separately, and we must keep in mind these properties too, reflect on how to benefit from those possessions. Land lying unexploited, untended, is a burden instead of a wealth. Harvests have not been very good in our territories, these last many years. Ghent must import too much of its food from out of Flanders. It seems to me the weather grows colder overall. The return from my lands has been little, but I have to admit I did not give my fields and meadows as much attention as I should have, and I think you have experienced the same. We have given thought first and foremost to enhance our ready cash and our investments in business ventures. Yet, the land is a reserve that cannot be destroyed like ships and wagon loads. We buy land, but it seems to me we are exhausting the fields. I feel we must spread our sowing, learn a lot more about growing crops, have large fields rest without production for a year and alternate our crops. We run the risk, of course, of diminishing the return from our fields by letting it lay fallow for a time, but the return from our crops has diminished anyway. We may as yet win by alternating crops and by alternating production and fallow lands, growing crops in cycles. We can sow wheat and rye in the first year, the most valuable grains, and then lesser crops such as oats and barley, maybe even peas and beans. We may leave the fields fallow the third year. To keep my return from the land stable in absolute figures, I intend to buy more land still, and preferably very fertile land. Fine fields can be bought north of Ghent, close to the city, but the most fertile territories can only be found further north and east, towards the Scheldt. Vast stretches of swamps can be dried out there and won from the stream, but at high cost in labour and investment. Dikes and canals cost much. The polder lands are yet the best for grain and even to keep cattle on. In other words, my friends, land needs as much attention as our businesses.'

Gillis Vresele saw the heads around him nod. He spoke again.

‘Managing our investments is a hard job . It demands intricate knowledge of prices, seeking partners for buying and selling, gain knowledge of which products can bring in the highest profits where and at which moment. The task of managing my ventures of business and of managing at the same time my lands has become a task too arduous for me. It is a task too arduous for any man, I believe. I have therefore decided on another scheme for managing my fortune. As of now, my son Boudin will deal with you for all investments in money. I have decided to keep one tenth of my money for my private upkeep and smaller business ventures. I hand over two-thirds of the rest of my ready funds to my son Boudin, to deal and trade on his own, and to deal with you. Nevertheless, I do not draw myself entirely into the shadows. Boudin will have to meet once a month with me and with my other son, Jehan Terhagen, to explain how he has performed with the family money.’

Gillis Vresele looked at astonished faces, not in the least to the reddening face of his son Boudin, for whom this announcement was new too.

‘That is not all,’ Gillis continued. ‘To handle efficiently fortunes as large as mine, I have considered one man cannot manage it all, and one man cannot know everything about all the aspects of funds raising, making judicious investments, launch vast trade operations, and of making many fields and real estate prosper. I put my other son, Jehan, in charge of my lands. He too will have a hard task. If Jehan accepts, he will manage all my properties of land around Ghent, the estates mostly north and east of the town. I leave the real estate in Ghent to Boudin, but Jehan will have to become the real landowner of the Vresele family. He will also receive one third of my ready money, the rest of the division of my fortune. If Jehan agrees, which I expect he will do, I would like him to live in his own manor of Terhagen near Axel in the Four Crafts. He can then manage the lands of my family around the bay of Axel and along the Scheldt. He will own the Vresele manor near Zelzate. He will extract peat, deal in the salt and herrings of Axel and Assenede, enhance the crops, be the owner of my two farms, and do whatever he deems necessary to buy and gain more polder lands along the stream and in the environs of Axel. We do not have to let lands lay fallow for longer than one year and thus rotate crops. He will have to learn much about agriculture, and I don’t expect him to do that in the shortest of times, but that is what I would like him to do. Terrains that bring little revenue from crops of grain can be turned into meadows for cattle to graze on. More meat and milk and cheese are consumed in Ghent by the day. Lately, the demand for cheese has grown spectacularly. To breed the cattle and make it profit, we need stables and farms, for cattle has to be brought inside to weather the colder winters we experience. The meadows must be made to produce the hay necessary to feed the animals in winter, and hay has to be stored in dry places. So, Jehan will have to build new farms, or buy existing farms. These are massive investments, for which he needs the ready money I laid out for him. I fully realise that the investments in land and in farms will not bring us as much profit our business ventures can offer, but the land and the harvests and the cattle will form the ultimate reserves of my family. Crops can be burnt or stolen by armies, but the land as reserve cannot ever be destroyed. Jehan will have to work hard, and he will have to lead many men, but I am confident he will be up to his task.’

I, Jehan Terhagen, sat flabbergasted. I was not really a son of the blood of the Vreseles, though Gillis had always considered me a son of the house. This public show of confidence, his love and affection, was utterly surprising and moving for me. I wondered about Gillis’s other son, Heinric. Nothing had been said about Heinric.

Raes the Elder formulated the question that also rang in my brain. ‘You have three sons, Gillis. What about Heinric?’

‘Heinric is my third son, yes,’ Gillis answered quickly, with a suddenly very hard, closed face and tight lips. ‘I consider him not fit for the pursuit of gains in money and in lands. He has studied to become a clerk, a keeper of books and of accounts. I will see to it that he can live in opulence from my part of the ready money and from the profits, but he shall neither manage the funds nor the land. I have told him my decision. He is not happy with the division of the family wealth, but such is my decision. We may agree on handing over parts of the profits to Heinric, but that is in the future. The sharing of my fortune is a temporary one and I remain the ultimate owner of it all in deeds, but my intention is to distribute the funds and the lands permanently and in full ownership to my two sons at the latest at my sixtieth anniversary. In the meanwhile, they should manage the fortune as they see fit. I shall intervene only if I deem them unworthy of the task, but I am confident such intervention will not be necessary.’

Gillis Vresele stooped speaking rather abruptly, so that we, the other Pharaïldis men, looked down at the table in stunned silence, for long moments unable to comment and react. I, for one, was terraced by the enormous responsibilities Gillis had placed on my shoulders. I felt very much unprepared. I had done little with my years to deserve the burden of the management of all possessions of land. Why had Gillis thrown something in my hands I knew nothing of? I had merely taken part in the discussions in Gillis’s house and during the Pharaïldis meetings about the trade ventures undertaken by Gillis and his friends. I had actually directly managed nothing and I had become a city boy, who knew nothing of land and animals! The sudden worries of overseeing vast domains, the constant seeking for opportunities in acquiring new fields and meadows and farms, the cunning necessary for negotiations with some of the worst wolves in the business of landowning, made my mouth now twitch nervously, my eyes turn and my brain numbed. I realised my years of happy insouciance were over! From now on I would have to reflect each day on how to gain money and power, for that was of course what Gillis’s words had all been about, hadn’t they? He had spoken about a new organisation for growing the fortune of the Vreseles, the family’s wealth, by allowing more than one man put his brains and shoulders to the task. There was not much love lost between Gillis and his son Heinric, I knew. Heinric had always remained aloof of his father, hidden in the skirts of his mother, fearing the giant his father was, showing so little of his emotions I sometimes wondered whether he experienced such feelings as affection, admiration, love, the joy of doing good, or even surprise. Heinric was no friend of mine and no friend even of Boudin. He was not a foe to us, but he acted not without malice and cunning. He was nice to whom impressed him, acted meek and subdued then, but he could be cruel, sarcastic and violent to whom he considered inferior to him, mainly to women. I did not like Heinric more than his father did, but I wanted to be just with him and I had not coveted his share of his father’s wealth.

We, the younger Pharaïldis men, also watched the other elders then, waiting for some form of reaction on Gillis’s new scheme. Would some of the older Pharaïldis men follow the example of Gillis Vresele? No, they wouldn’t, not that evening! Though considerably older than Gillis Vresele, they found it probably much harder to depart with their possessions. We saw they still clung to their prerogatives, to the full control of their wealth. They sat jealously on their wealth, reluctant to relent it. Gillis’s move had surprised them. Old men, I understood, do not like to let go of their power in the family. The Pharaïldis men were reasonable, rational men, but Gillis’s organisation came too sudden for them. They would have to think twice about the implications of what Gillis proposed. Gillis certainly had hoped for others to follow his lead, for he could have proposed his scheme only at home. He had chosen to present it at a Pharaïldis meeting for a purpose, we felt, introducing a new way of viewing about money and about the gain of money, but the idea had to sink into the heads of the others. I smiled. Gillis,

in fact, had also not relented power at all! He had merely distributed the work and the worries, and appealed to more brains to come up with original ideas. In his monthly meetings with us, he would still exert total control over Boudin and I, for he knew we would not dare take any initiative of importance without asking for his opinion, which would be the same as asking for his consent and advice.

A silence fell in the hall. We drank. Boudin and I looked at each other, smiling. Although Gillis's fortune had been split, we knew we would always place our funds and reserves together, at the disposal of the family, and do nothing of grave consequence without the other's knowledge or involvement. The lands would constitute our reserve and even though I would own them, the reserves would be there to be used by the family. They would remain also at the disposal of Boudin when his affairs faltered, when ruin might threaten him.

The first to break the silence, finally, was Arnout de Hert, the oldest among us. He changed subjects.

'We have no James van Artevelde anymore to defend our views,' he began. 'Ghent is run by Gerard Denijs now, and by his gang of supporters, but that will not last long. I doubt Denijs will be re-elected as dean of the weavers next time. The weavers suffer from an ugly conscience for Bad Monday, and they blame Denijs for the victims. We lost our friends, the van Vaernewijcs and the van Lenses, in the town council. They will still exert some influence in the matters of government, but surely only by covert means. What do we need from the future government of this town?'

Raes van Lake answered, largely expressing how we all felt, 'we cannot throw another charismatic personality to the forefront of politics. I do not want to create a second James van Artevelde, even not if we succeeded in finding such another man, which is far from obvious. I say we should now once more support the count of Flanders, but seek a counter-weight to his court in Ghent, so that he dare not and cannot touch our privileges. We must continue the work of James van Artevelde, which means still play out France against England, but without offering direct involvement except by limited means in the wars. We must keep to England for our wool and to France for our grain, ensuring our waterways are kept open for transport and trade. We must work with what we have, with words and with judiciously invested funds, realising that words are cheap and funds expensive. By talking, explaining our views strongly but discreetly, all of us providing the same messages in our respective guilds, supporting in the town council the men who think as we do, we may as yet influence official viewpoints and decisions.'

'Very wisely spoken,' intervened Gillis Vresele. 'The cities, members of Flanders, the cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, will hold on to the views and tactics installed by James van Artevelde for yet a long time to come. I suspect the count, Louis of Nevers, to gain more influence in the coming months over Flanders, under the pressure and focused attention of one man to one purpose. His emphasis must have more impact and succeed better than the non-concerted, lesser concerted care of the cities' aldermen to their cause. Even Louis of Nevers, however, will not be able to return matters as they were before the policy of the van Artevelde times. He has lost too much credit in Flanders! No, my friends, we may as yet have to live in uncertain times of unsafe roads, of talk of battles and of skirmishes, of wandering armies through our countries and threats of destruction of the countryside and villages, of burning and killing and rape, but we have with Ghent the power to fend off such horrors and keep them far from our town. Ghent needs not only our advice, but also our prosperity, for by the taxes we pay we strengthen our city and we inspire awe in our potential enemies. Ghent must be known to be rich. I am afraid nevertheless, that great sorrow may be in the making outside

Ghent, in the territories between the ports of Sluis and Damme and the larger city of Paris. King Edward III will make sure France does not wage war in his fief of England. He will bring the war to France to spare England, thereby fortifying his position in the parliament of London. France will suffer more, mainly of course the French countryside. This leads me to one more remark, Gillis. You seem to split your fortune between the city and the countryside, having Boudin work out of Ghent but sending Jehan to the exposed fields of Axel. Do you not thereby send Jehan into less secure territory?’

‘Yes, of course,’ Gillis acknowledged. ‘Axel and the lands around that town are less secure than Ghent is. We must nevertheless build up our reserves in land and in agriculture. In the worst of times, we must be able to live off the land. I stress how important it is for us in unsafe times, and times will always remain unsafe, to feel self-providing. Our fortune provides much of our safety, for money too is a reserve. Ultimately, however, when famine rocks a land or a city, or war, our own produce from the countryside may save us. Moreover, if the countryside becomes ever subject to great distress, Jehan can always return to the safety of Ghent. We shall buy him a house in the *kuipe* where he can come back to at will with his future family.’

I blushed. I had not thought yet about a wife and my own family. I had not yet fallen in love. I had much frolicked about with girls, but I had taken none serious. The girls I had met so far I had mostly found silly and superficial. None had really caught my eye. I had also not thought about having a family as something of a duty. Would I have to change my ways so drastically? What had Gillis forced onto me?

That September evening, the Pharaïldis men continued talking for a few hours about their business enterprises, about the movement of prices of materials, utensils and food products, but the really important subjects had been tackled. We passed an agreeable evening together.

\*\*\*\*\*

I rode to Axel on a bleak day of October 1345. I was not in a hurry and in a sad mood to have to leave my friends and the glorious Ghent maidens behind in the bustling town I loved. I would have to bury myself in the lonely, windswept, bleak plains of Axel. The last time I had travelled to my ancestral domain was three years past. Only the rain that at times pelted down hard on my hood, legs and poor horse, withheld me from riding much slower and stop at each village on the way.

Very late in the evening, I saw the grey sky becoming one with the blurred line on the horizon low over the land and over the walls of Terhagen. I rode through the gate and remarked an even more saddening scene inside the farm that was to be my home. The inner yard was clean, and so were the gate and the manor. The stones were well-jointed and straight, no plants emerged from scars in the walls, no grass made the stones of the yard green. In the middle of the yard, however, lay an enormous heap of dung, which stank a lot worse than the filthiest gutter of Ghent. I could not have that dung heap in front of my eyes each time I opened the windows of my bedroom!

A maid emerged from out of a barn with a pail of water in her hands. She dropped the pail from sheer surprise of seeing me so close to her. She ran into the manor house, crying something I didn’t understand. Did this woman even speak Flemish? I rode up to the front door of the manor and put one foot on the ground from out of the saddle, when the steward burst out of the house with a long, wooden fork in his hands.

‘So far for the defence of my Camelot,’ I thought.

I shouted, ‘don’t fear! Everything is all right, Geert. It is only I, Jehan Terhagen, your lord. Jehan Terhagen from Ghent! I’ve come to stay a while on my domain. No need to panic! I am alone!’

I lowered my hood and Geert the ridiculous fork, after which a broad smile appeared in his face. Geert had been hired a very long time ago by Gillis Vresele, and he had been a man of a certain age already at that time. By now, he had definitely aged, aged much! His hair was all white, his beard too, and his hair hung low and straggly. The smile he gave me was toothless, his eyes wrinkled and small, and his nose looked bulbous with wens. A paunch hung over his belt, proving a good life. His wife fed him well. Gillis must have remarked somebody young was needed on the farm! From behind the steward I saw the straw-coloured wisps of the maid I had inadvertently struck with panic in the yard, now staring anxiously with large eyes at my enormous, exhausted, rain-wary dark stallion.

The direction of the eyes reminded me of my horse.

‘Can you please have somebody take care of my horse, Geert?’ I asked, drawing my bags from the saddle and handing the reins to him. ‘I am as tired from the trip as my horse. I’ll drop these off in my room and then I’d like something warm to eat, maybe with a glass of ale to spend the rest of the evening. I’ll hop into bed soon! I suppose we can talk about the domain later, I have a lot to learn from you.’

‘Of course, of course, lord,’ Geert shouted, while I ran up the few stairs to the inside, glad to seek shelter in the warmth of the house. The straw-headed girl, sixteen or so, ran from me and disappeared to a side at which I knew lay the kitchen.

I didn’t do much more that evening than eat, drink and expose my body to the heat of the fire in the large hearth of what should become my main hall. I thought about my childhood in this hall, how my mother moved and my father laughed, but the memories were scarce. The hall had been well kept too. Fresh straw lay on the tiles, and I smelled fragrant herbs in it, lavender maybe, and sage. The old wife of Geert served me thick, warm slices of delicious pork with an excellent gruel, a chicken pie, carrots and cabbages. After that she proposed a home-made pudding, which I could not refuse, and then cheese. I nodded gratefully to her, a mouth full of pork and gruel dripping from my chin. I fear I may have made not too fine an impression on her. My manners certainly could improve, but I was starved that day. Later, when my spirits had more or less returned among the living, I asked her whether she had prepared the meal. She nodded, as I had nodded before, or she might just have been a woman of few words. I made her a fine, eloquent speech of praise, added a few gestures of my arms and hands, lauding her for the grandeur of her food, at which she beamed but retreated hastily to the kitchen. Her husband Geert only entered the room when I had finished eating, no doubt warned by his wife. He announced he had lit a fire in my bedroom, for the lord’s quarters had not been used once that year (also not the previous years), and the damp of the rains had made the walls and the air icy cold. I knew what to expect. I thanked the man, yawned, and told him I was too tired to say one more benign word. I went upstairs, threw off my clothes, leapt on the bed, hid among the sheets, and slept instantly.

The next morning I thought I had gotten up early, but I heard already many different noises in the farm. They reminded me I was in the countryside, not in lazy Ghent. Cows lowed and oxen bellowed, sheep bloated happily, and cocks haughtily called dawn. A blacksmith was at work on iron. I heard the hammering slash high. Those were happy sounds indeed, very different from the shouts, the thumping of the feet of the crowds in the streets of Ghent, the permanent, hard noise of the wheeled carts being drawn on the cobbles, and, so typical for Ghent, the humming of the looms and the slamming of the woods by the weavers.

I dressed, splattered a little cold water over my face and hands, took a new shirt from my bags, and ran downstairs asking for breakfast. Breakfast stood on the table in the hall. Geert van Dorp, the steward, lingered in the room, so I put him straightaway out of his misery.

‘Steward Geert,’ I said before breaking my first lump of bread, ‘I have not come home to change anything whatsoever to your status. On the contrary, we have great things to do! You are my steward and Gillis Vresele has told me more often than not how much he trusted you and what good work you did at Terhagen. I intend to change nothing at all about your position on the farm. Other changes there will be, for I intend to live here and manage the domain, enhancing it with new land and other farms. I hope you will continue advising me instead of Gillis, and manage the farms and crops as before. You and your family need not leave the domain for as long as you live, but you may have to put up with my whims and outright stupidity, for I know little of life in the countryside. You have my permission to tell me in the face when I’m a donkey, and I promise I will at least listen to your arguments. Does that suit you?’

I noticed the man was relieved to be allowed to continue his ways and to remain living here. He would have to endure me, which would be a hard task anyway, but the stability of life I offered him was generous.

Geert nodded and merely said, ‘I thank you, lord. It is a relief to hear you may keep me here. Of course I will be glad and honoured to show you what we have and do in the farm. Currently, we live in the manor. Should we leave and find another place, maybe in the barns? More rooms have been built and prepared there for such an eventuality.’

‘No, no, no,’ I assured him. ‘You don’t bother me at all. I prefer having a few people around. I would not want to miss the excellent food of your wife! Can she go on cooking for me? I expect us to have our meals together. I will be on travel often, though. It is much better for a family to live in the house than to have it stand cold and abandoned. Was that blond girl I saw yesterday your daughter?’

Geert thanked me profusely, understood I had not come to stay after all only for a few days but for much longer, and corrected me in that the girl who stood giggling at the door of the kitchen was his grand-daughter. His son worked in Axel and lived in town but left his daughter frequently in the farm. Geert welcomed new company, he assured me, but his eyes hardened when I had mentioned the blond daughter. Luckily I had not mentioned how pretty the girl was. She was a real tender beauty! I made a promise to myself to nurture no intention of touching a grandchild of van Dorp!

The next days I spent rather agreeably in looking around the farm and the surrounding fields. I did not particularly like what I saw. The manor was quite a fine house, but it had been designed and remained a manor within a farm. I did not think of myself as an arrogant man, nor as a man of high ambitions, but I did long for something better. Gillis Vresele had told me in Ghent how much money I could use for buying new land and enhance production on the Vresele estate in the countryside. The amounts he cited made my head spin. The funds I would have to work with, and for which I had to bring in more money than Gillis ever could, were staggeringly high. It was expensive to dry out polders, build new dikes, erect new farms, but still the wealth of the Vreseles astonished me and made me stare at the figures in real awe. Gillis then showed me also how much I myself owned, in lands and in money from the profits of my own fields and meadows, and from money my family had owned. That money too, Gillis Vresele had multiplied. He handed the figures over to me, and told me how I could lay my hands on the silver and the gold. The money had been deposited in several places in more

than one town for additional security. I thought about bringing this money to good use. I could invest in modifying the farm of Terhagen.

Steward Geert explained what he did with the farm, how he worked. I visited the stables with him and saw how many journeymen he employed. No serfs worked in the farm, I was not the lord of a castellany or of a craft, just a petty noble whose origins may even not have been of Axel. I talked a lot with Geert in the evenings, and he explained gradually more and more, opening to me as if to a son over glasses of white brandy. The brandy made from grains and herbs warmed our bodies and our hearts in that freezing cold winter of 1346. Geert van Dorp and I became good friends, and I had to acknowledge the wisdom, cunning and dedication of the old man. I was soon convinced that Geert was a lot more intelligent than Gillis suspected, or maybe Gillis did know! I relied more and more on Geert's wisdom.

I wondered what I could do with Terhagen. I had heard the Pharaïldis men discuss matters of security. I was particularly touched by that subject. How could I live as safely at Terhagen as in Ghent? I remembered how my parents and family had been murdered by a wild bunch of not more than twelve angry, stupid hoodlums who had roamed in the environs. I did not want that ever to be repeated. If I was to live here with a family, I needed much more added protection!

I walked around the walls of the farm and of the manor, looked at the state of the barns, stood with my closed fists in my sides in front of the house, and gave up. Terhagen could not be turned into the impregnable fortress I desired! I would have to demolish most of the site, rebuild, and then I would still end up with a fortified farm that could be taken easily by a gang of fifty bandits. I didn't need a place that could withstand an army, but I did need a place that could be defended and held by a few men against a hundred. I needed a castle! I also did not want the stink of decay and of animal dung in my nostrils each moment of the day. I said nothing to Geert, but I had a look at the other side of the small river or canal that ran next to the road to Axel. I owned land on that side too.

The stretch of land opposite Terhagen had potential. It was ground running somewhat higher, dry ground, it seemed, too. It was no swamp, no polder. Dikes were far off. The land there lay fallow and no bridge had been thrown over the river. I also found no easy ford in the water close by. I had to force my horse into the water of the river to get to the other side. My precious stallion did not have to swim, but it stepped in deep water that reached almost to my knees. On the other side, the terrain sloped gently towards the river. Where a manor could be built stood a small wood of trees not very high. Most of that wood would have to go if I wanted to build there. I stayed half a day studying that patch of land.

I imagined my castle on the land, small but imposing, very practical, a castle fit for a knight. Was I not a lord of this country now? Most of the land around belonged to me. I wanted the people of the environs, of the villages and even of Axel, to respect me. I would appeal on the desire of the people for pomp and ceremonial, for fine clothes as they would never wear, work on their imagination with some show of wealth. The new Ter Hage would be a place for the people of Axel to dream of, a place they would be proud of and wanted to preserve, not attack, the image of everything that was fine and good and beautiful in life, made by local artisans. Did I have the money? I had no idea how much money such a place would cost.

I thought of a pentagon. On two sides of the pentagon, facing south, I would erect my manor of three floors high. The lowest floor would hold a very large kitchen and storerooms. On the first floor I would have a large hall and a smaller hall, a sitting-room for me and my family.

Above that floor would be the sleeping rooms and yet other rooms to store things. I would need a bathing room near a heating room for hot water, on the lowest floor. On the other side, next to the manor, I wanted a lower building, only two floors high, with rooms fitted to receive visitors. A hall, bedrooms, sitting-rooms, another large hearth and a bathing room would do. I saw latrines for the two buildings, the urine and turd running into a large stone cistern that could be emptied in spring. On the other side of the pentagon I would put horse stables. I did not want many stables inside, not for more than four or five horses. Next to the stables we would place a store room for hay and fodder. I could build rooms for servants above the stables, and also next to the stables. I drew hay lofts, mews and storehouses. I would need two or three men with their families, warriors who could help me defend the castle and serve in the manor. One of the women had to be a good cook. Two more women as servants would do. I was left with two empty sides and the corner between them. I would have plain walls there, but walls with crenellations and a gangway on which I and guards could walk and look out over the country. The walls should be high, as high as the other buildings. Then, I thought of added protection. I looked at the canal. I could divert the water in a wide moat all around the castle. I imagined four feet of grassy ground around the castle, and then the stone moat filled with water, twenty feet wide. I wanted open space of grass around, no shallows along the water.

At the point where the two walls met, the two remaining sides of my pentagon, I could have a gatehouse. I wanted two drawbridges, not one. One drawbridge would lay over the moat and another one over the short stretch of ground between the moat and the gate. The two drawbridges would serve as one combined barrier. They would have to be lowered by the same mechanism, serve as one drawbridge only, but form two obstacles. I wanted four barbican towers there, round monsters, interconnected with each other and with the castle walls. Each round, sturdy tower with very thick walls, no door in them below, would hold the drawbridges and the oak gates. I added a portcullis, inventing a system of levers and counter-weights to lower and raise the herse. Soon, I had the entire structure standing proudly in my imagination, turrets pointing proudly and defiantly to the sky, with gleaming white walls of stone and timber, and the imposing gate towers telling to passers-by, ‘watch out, you mortals, for this is the castle of a powerful lord who is as wealthy as you can only dream of!’

The only issue was: how much would such a monster cost, and could it be built with local stonemasons?

I produced with much effort a crude drawing of what I wanted, on parchment. I drew the outline as seen from above so that the pentagon became clear, and even the walls inside the buildings. Then I made a picture of the double gate and the two drawbridges, as well as a view of the castle as seen from the sides and the far. I made a drawing of the manor, the layout of the rooms in detail, and I placed lengths in feet on the sketch. Another drawing with lengths of the moat I placed before the very astonished eyes of Geert van Dorp. I told him I would have to divert the run of the river, so that it flowed around the castle. I told him I wanted a very strong place with high walls and thick walls, but that was to be elegant as well. In my inner yard I wanted no dung heap, no animals, not even chicken, but if possible a small garden and a fine tree to give shade in summer. I had thought of another garden outside of the castle, in front of the windows of the mansion, with a small door and stairs leading to the first floor, but that touch could wait.

Geert van Dorp looked at the various drawings, laughed, and said, ‘this is going to cost a fortune! I cannot give you an estimate. We should go see Lammin Metsers!’

‘Who is Lammin Metsers?’ I asked.

‘Lammin is a builder, one of the best in Axel. He will know what to do.’

‘Have you thought of wells?’ van Dorp wondered.

‘No, I haven’t, and you are very right. We should build where we can dig our own wells, two of them at least.’

‘I know a water-sorcerer,’ Geert replied. ‘Should be no problem.’

We did not ride to Axel to see Lammin. We send a message for him to come to Terhagen.

We had him sit in the hall, and I showed Lammin my drawings.

Geert asked Lammin two simple questions, ‘how much will it cost to build this, and can you build it?’

Lammin was a rough-hewn man of few words, as everybody near Axel was, and to which I was now accustomed.

He said only, ‘I see what you want. Yes to the second question. I’ll have to calculate a few days on the first question, but I can even after that only give you a very approximate figure anyway.’

‘What is the most expensive in this building?’ I asked, ‘the stones or the labour?’

‘Stones?’ he turned to me, surprised, ‘do you want this in stones?’

‘In what else?’ I retorted quickly. ‘We cannot build this in dough!’

Lammin did not appreciate my humour.

‘Bricks!’ he spat.

‘In bricks? Aren’t bricks too soft, will they not crumble under the weight? Will they be strong enough to withstand a small siege?’

‘We may need a few stones for the foundations. You might have the first, lowest ten feet or so in stones, the rest I would build in bricks. I must think about the foundations. A lot easier and less expensive, bricks are! No, they won’t crumble. The aspect of the walls would be nicer, warmer, and bricks, well-fired bricks, are as strong as stones. They also weather rains well.’

‘Where could I get the stones?’ I asked, ‘where the bricks?’

‘The convent of Ter Hage has a quarry for good stone, not far off. Bricks have to come from further north than Axel. Less expensive than stone, but half price in brick and half price in transport. Wagonloads of bricks will be needed!’

‘How are bricks made?’

‘Clay and loam muds placed into forms, any form not too high, then fired in kilns. Hard as stones after firing!’

‘Is there clay mud here, nearby?’ I asked.

I remarked Lammin’s eyes gleam suddenly. He had understood in no time, the old fox.

‘There must be,’ he said, ‘same soil as higher up. On the right side of the river, behind the farm. I should have a look.’

We were pretty much finished for the moment, so I gave him my drawings, and Geert and I took him to behind the farm, where Lammin indeed found sufficiently good brick material.

‘Some of the loam must be scratched off,’ he decided, ‘and there is quite some sand here, but you have clay indeed. This ground will do.’

‘Can you build us a kiln, ovens to fire the clay?’ I asked hopefully.

‘Nope,’ he shook his head. ‘You must ask Lauwers Christiaens!’

I despaired. ‘Who is Lauwers Christiaens?’

‘The owner of brick ovens north of Axel. Maybe he can set up kilns here. Don’t know whether he will want to, though!’

‘All right,’ I said. ‘I’ll talk to this maker of bricks. I’ll bring him to build us a brick factory, here.’

Lammin and Geert were sceptical.

Three days later in the afternoon, Lammin Metsers showed up again at Terhagen. We took him once more to the large hall. He placed my drawings open on the table.

‘I had to adapt the lengths,’ he began. ‘The actual lengths were all right, more or less, but you have to take the thickness of the walls into account everywhere. I must build the walls thicker than you drew. I calculated the number of bricks, of stones, the beams of oak, their price, the hours needed for the work. Also for the inner walls and for the floors. I calculated the tiles on the lowest floors. I did not calculate the carvings you might want on the timber and on the doors and windows. I did take into account wood against some of the walls; you will find those indicated on the drawings. I proposed slate roofs. Here are the figures, and below I added the total price.’

‘Show me the numbers, explain,’ I replied.

Lammin had everything neatly written down, better than I could ever have done. I remarked he had added turrets and modified the windows to add some elegance to the façades. He gave me the very approximate price.

‘The total is very approximate,’ he declared honestly. ‘From previous buildings, in my experience, I know that the price can go up by one fifth to one third, depending on what you would wish to change while I’m building. I need twenty people, among which seven masons at work for an entire year, maybe two years, depending on the weather and so on. Lammin cited a figure in pounds *groot*, in Flemish pounds.

Frankly, I was stunned. I had expected a lot more. Still, Lammin Metsers mentioned a figure that amounted to about half my fortune in gold, my own personal money, not Vresele gold. I could build my castle even if it cost double in the end!

I too was a man of few words.

‘When can you start?’ I asked.

Lammin said nothing, then. He merely grinned and stuck out his large, rough hand, for me to shake. Geert laughed his head off.

‘I start tomorrow,’ Lammin stated laconically. ‘I need to dig first. We must build shacks for the masons, but you’ll have to get us the bricks soon! In the total, I calculated the bricks plus the transport. If you fire bricks nearby, you will have the castle cheaper. I don’t know yet how far we can get in the ground with the foundations, and we may hit ground water. I’ll have to slam oak timbers into the ground then, which may augment the price some. I ask for payment each week, expenses justified.’

I said, ‘Geert van Dorp, the steward, sits on the purse. He’ll pay. Food for the men will come from the farm.’

That was all there was to it.

Next dawn, Lammin stood at the gate of Terhagen with five workers and two wagonloads of timber. The first thing he did was construct a sturdy bridge over the canal in front of Terhagen. We needed a bridge to bring timber, bricks, stones, tools and food from the road of Axel to the other side. Included in the price, mentioned Lammin Metsers.

I rode to Axel to find Lauwers Christiaens.

Lammin Metsers was a short, stocky man with a very red face, prominent nose and heavy-lidded eyes, callused hands as large as shovels, active and nervous of nature, but of few words as all men of the environs of Axel. Lammin was in his fifties. Lauwers Christiaens, when I found him, about the same age, looked quite the contrary. A rangy, lean man with an angular, emaciated face, he looked as if he had been pressed together like the mud of his bricks. I never knew him to sit. Lauwers lived standing. I found him between two kilns, face reddened from the heat, cursing his workers to hell. I explained to him I wanted to build a manor in

bricks, near Terhagen, whereupon his clear, grey eyes began to shine like a white diamond, and he took me to his home.

Over a pot of ale placed on the table by a surprisingly lovely woman about as old as he, he asked, ‘how many bricks do you want?’

I gave him the figure Lammin had calculated, more or less. Lauwers almost fell from his chair. He eyed me for a few moments as if I had been a madman come to his house, and then, grinning, he gave me a price that corresponded neatly to the figure Lammin had presented me with.

‘Is that a price including transport to Terhagen?’ I threw back at him.

He smiled meekly, and added half to his price.

‘No way,’ I smiled gently. ‘I have clay. How much to set up kilns at Terhagen and making bricks near my site?’

‘No way,’ he shook. ‘The bricks come from my working site, here.’

‘No way,’ I continued. ‘We make bricks near Terhagen, or you shall sell me no bricks at all.’ The discussion went on for a while.

We ended by agreeing on Lauwers Christiaens setting up what was nothing less than a brick factory behind the farm of Terhagen, we sharing the price for the factory, but we also sharing the profits from the brickmaking site after the castle was finished. So, I had bought me half a brickyard, which might bring in nice profits, and I could have bricks at half price. We shook hands to the deal. I began to like the people of Axel!

‘When you come to Terhagen one of these days,’ I proposed, ‘we can sign the agreement on parchment.’

‘I don’t believe in parchment,’ he refused. ‘You are a trader of Ghent, aren’t you? One of the Vresele family?’

‘Yes I am,’ I told him.

I was not really a Vresele, but my family kinsmen, the Vreseles were traders indeed.

‘You might try selling bricks in Ghent. Good construction material. You have cogs. We can load cogs in Axel and bring bricks over the Scheldt to Antwerp and Ghent.’

I thought that over. I remembered something about the prices of bricks in Ghent. I would have to talk to John de Hert, the shipper.

‘Not just to Ghent,’ I added. ‘We can sell bricks in Brabant, out of Dendermonde, bring them to other towns, even to Sluis and Bruges. I own no cogs, but I have a friend who has cogs and river boats.’

‘What is the name of your friend?’

‘John de Hert,’ I gave.

‘I heard the name. I heard he is an honest shipper. I have known your father, you know. I was a young boy and my father didn’t even own the house we lived in. We were poor, very poor. There was a famine in Axel. I don’t recall why or how, but your father helped us out, your mother too. He was a nice man. He helped us out of our misery. What happened to your parents was sad. We mourned. The bandits who assaulted Terhagen came from the south. We only heard of it two days later. We came to see with our own eyes, spoke to Mother Amalberga of the abbey. Sad, sad! No need for parchment. Our deal holds as long as we live.’ I had a lump in my throat when I left Lauwers.

I also got my stones from the quarry of the abbey of Ter Hage two days later, at a good price, and only a little later five hard men came from Axel in a chariot and they began building two enormous kilns to fire bricks in. Lauwers didn’t even show up at first. He checked on the work later on.

‘You don’t let grass grow over a project of yours,’ Lammin Metsers commented when the first kiln was fired. Geert van Dorp, Lauwers Christiaens and I watched with satisfaction. We got drunk in the evening. I made a note in my head I should get in more wine for Terhagen. I understood I had forgotten to add cellars!

‘Cellars are included,’ Lammin grinned. ‘I haven’t forgotten them!’

I always appreciated that word ‘included’!

The next day I told to Geert the steward I should start thinking of enlarging the Vresele estates by judicious acquisitions of polders or ready fields and meadows. Where could I buy land?

‘I know of a few good places of fertile ground,’ Geert van Dorp declared.

I was less confident of myself when after the first month I met Gillis Vresele at the meeting in Ghent where I was to explain what I had done so far. I had bought some land, in a hurry, but I hadn’t done much work for him.

‘I bought you some land near the bay of Axel,’ I said. ‘The land is good, dry already, no dikes are necessary there. We should build a farm close by.’

‘Anything else?’ he asked, eyeing me suspiciously.

Had Gillis expected more of me?

‘Well, I am also building myself a castle with my own money. The farm manor of Terhagen won’t do for offering protection to a family. Don’t worry about the money! We calculated I have sufficient own means for the construction. I don’t have to delve into Pharaïldis funds for the castle. The castle will be built in bricks, so I bought a brickyard first, to have bricks to set up the farms, and I am going to trade in bricks too, from out of Axel and Antwerp. John de Hert will help with transport. A brick, transport included, cost so much and the bricks currently sold in Ghent cost more.’

Gillis was stunned at first. He had thought of salt and peat and herrings, not of bricks.

‘Much building going on in Ghent,’ I tried desperately, quite unsure of my arguments. ‘Bricks are a fine material for constructing *stenen*, stone houses. We can produce inexpensive roof panes too. We are going to expand to Ghent. You know, you could use a *steen*! I can build you a best-priced *steen*, a stone house of excellent quality and fine structure. I have the bricks, the wooden beams, the stones for the foundations and lower walls I can get from Mother Amalberga of the Ter Hage convent, for we made a deal, and I have a construction team! What do you say?’

Gillis then burst out I laughter, slammed his fist on the table, and I saw tears flowing from his eyes, from sheer joy. I guessed I had passed the test! I didn’t add it was only I who owned the brickyard, not he.

Many years later, the brickyard brought in huge profits for Lauwers Christiaens and me. Part of that trade even paid for my castle! Later still, we set up together a brickyard in Brabant, where the soil was far better suited for brick-making.

The building of New Ter Hage went on through the entire year 1346 and six months into 1347, for I indeed wanted a few changes while we were at it.

## The Low Countries and Crécy

Right after the murder of James van Artevelde, uprisings started at several places of Flanders, directed against the dominance of the three main cities. Bruges quenched issues at Aardenburg; Ghent had to dispatch armed forces to Axel and Hulst in the *Vier Ambachten*, the

*Quatuor Officia*, the Four Crafts, the northern lands of the county. The revolts were inspired by Count Louis of Nevers and by *Leliaert* knights out of Dendermonde. Troops led by the newly appointed *ruwaard* of Flanders, Zeger de Kortrijkzaan, then stormed that town of Dendermonde. The town had obstructed the Scheldt and the Dender rivers with barriers of boats in order to hinder the shippers of Ghent from reaching Antwerp and the hinterland of Brabant. The forces of Ghent and of Ieper captured Dendermonde quite rapidly. The three main Flemish cities then called in John Duke of Brabant to mediate between them and the city on the Scheldt. Dendermonde was to compensate the Flemish merchants who had suffered trade losses because of the obstacles in the rivers. Breaches were to be made in the defences of the town on the side of Ghent and it was once more forbidden for the town to produce cloth of high quality. All banished knights were still forbidden to enter the territory of Flanders, now also the duchy of Brabant. Dendermonde was fined and had to deliver eight hostages to each of the three cities of Flanders and to the Duke of Brabant to guarantee the execution of the final agreement.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the autumn of 1345, Duke John of Brabant still supported the eternal alliance with the three main cities of Flanders, as he had sworn in his castle of Brussels a few years earlier. Nevertheless, Duke John also sought an alliance with King Philip VI of Valois in the beginning of 1346, having lost faith in the ability of King Edward III of England to make firm his claims on the French throne. King Edward was back in England, as always in need of much money and not being able to raise the sums necessary for war. Duke John sent envoys to Paris, and reached an elaborate agreement with King Philip. Duke John would receive Dendermonde as dowry to his daughter Margaret, who had been betrothed to the fifteen year old son of Louis de Nevers, the heir to the county of Flanders. The town of Mechelen would be given to the heir of Brabant. Pope Clement VI sought peace over Mechelen, so he urged the bishop of Liège, who was still the titular owner of the city, to transfer the domains to the successor of Brabant, to Henry of Brabant. It lasted until June of 1346 until all the titles of Flanders and of Liège could officially be handed over to Henry. By the same treaty between Brabant and France, the Duke's second son and his daughter Marie were to marry nobles of France. In return, Duke John promised to repudiate his eternal alliance with Flanders and Hainault at the first opportunity. These terms were kept a secret, of course, for they would have led to protests in Flanders, Hainault and in the cities. The arrangements would also partly be ended by the death of Henry in 1349, as well as by the death of his brother Godfrey in 1352. Duke John thereby lost both his sons and male heirs.

In the spring of 1347, Duke John of Brabant approached King Philip of Valois for further peace and a during alliance. In a meeting at Saint-Quentin in June of 1348, Duke John of Brabant officially rejected his alliance with King Edward. Arrangements were made for the marriage of Duke John's son Henry with Jeanne, eldest daughter of John duke of Normandy, who was Philip of Valois' heir. The duke's other son, Godefrey, would marry Bonne, daughter of Duke Pierre of Bourbon. King Philip accepted the eternal alliance between Brabant, Flanders and Hainault to continue. This was an alliance for mutual aid against a common enemy. Duke John did not want this alliance to be broken because he feared the reaction of the cities of Brabant. The duke was also allowed to fulfil his feudal obligations to the emperor, even against the king of France, in the case of a war between the empire and the kingdom of France. The new alliance between France and Brabant was clearly designed to sever the links between Brabant and England! Duke John promised to exert his influence to have the towns of Brabant carry out the terms of the new alliance with France. In return, the

heir of Brabant, Duke Henry, was to receive the title to the town of Mechelen, which would be surrendered to Brabant by Count Louis. Henry would also receive the duchy of Limburg. King Philip provided the duke of Brabant with large sums of money.

In July of 1347, at the Bois de Vincennes near Paris, the sons of the duke of Brabant, Henry and Godefrey, were married to Jeanne, daughter of the heir of France, the duke of Normandy, and to Bonne, daughter of Duke Pierre of Bourbon. The sealed arrangements bound the duke of Brabant tightly to Philip of Valois.

\*\*\*\*\*

In September of 1345 died Count William of Hainault, Holland, Zeeland and Friesland. William left no male heir. Nearest of kin were his three sisters, Philippa, Margaret and Joanna. Philippa was wife to King Edward III of England. Margaret was the wife of Emperor Lewis the Bavarian. Joanna had been married to Margrave William of Jülich. The lands of the deceased Count William all lay in the German Empire, to be granted by the German Emperor, so it was Lewis the Bavarian, though excommunicated by Pope Clement VI, who granted the vast domains to a successor. Lewis of course gave the four lands to his wife Margaret, claiming she was the eldest heiress of the House of Avesnes of the counts of Hainault. Margaret arrived in March of 1346, receiving the homage of the aldermen of the cities. Her authority was immediately established and secured.

After a while, Emperor Lewis the Bavarian longed for his wife at his side, for he was fond of her. On September the seventh of 1346, at Frankfurt, Emperor Lewis handed over the lands of Hainault, Holland, Zeeland and Friesland to his second son William, confirming his wife Margaret as governor. Margaret thus transferred her authority to her son. Margaret desired to keep the peace with England, so she met with her sister Philippa at Ieper in October of 1346, King Edward then having won his splendid victory at Crécy and besieging Calais. From Ghent, John Willade and John uten Hove participated in that meeting. Philippa consented to launch no aggressive actions against her sister. The authority of Margaret and of her son William over Hainault was thus reinforced.

Count Reginald of Guelders and Margrave William of Jülich in the meantime, decided to have the fourteen year old Reginald the Younger, son of the Count of Guelders, marry the Margrave's eldest daughter. Reginald fled in May of 1347, however, rode to Antwerp and made arrangements to marry Mary, the daughter of the Duke of Brabant instead.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Truce of Malestroit between France and England was to remain unviolated until Michaelmas, Saint Michael's Day at the end of September of 1346, but the truce had been repeatedly broken by all sides. In the spring of 1346 therefore, King Edward III ordered a fleet to be assembled for the invasion of France. He had again in his possession the necessary funds for the campaign.

King Edward III did not really rely anymore on his allies in the Low Countries. Brabant, he knew, had made overtures to France and was discussing an alliance with Philip of Valois. The succession of Hainaut was still in dispute between his wife Philippa and Empress Margaret, wife of Lewis the Bavarian. James van Artevelde, his staunchest supporter in Flanders had been killed, and support for his cause in Flanders was shaky, for fought by a hostile Count and a part of the population of Flanders, foremost among these the *Leliaert* knights. Edward yet

sent envoys to the three main cities of Flanders who continued to help him. Another discussion took place at Arras with cardinals delegated by the Pope. Ghent sent William de Bomere and John de Visch to assist in these talks, and also William van Vaernewijk played a significant role in conversations with Edward's envoys.

King Edward III sailed from Portsmouth on the fifth of July of 1346 with more than seven hundred vessels and about fifteen thousand warriors. He landed with his fleet at Saint-Vaast-la-Hogue in Normandy on the thirteenth of July of 1346, disembarking his men-at-arms during two days and then aiming eastward to unite with the Flemish armies that were to march south. The king launched a frightening *chevauchée*, a wild, destructive campaign through the Cotentin peninsula, devastating the land, burning everything of value in the countryside, sacking and burning the villages and towns on his way. Barfleur, Cherbourg, Caen, Troarn and many other were captured by storm, plundered and destroyed. Thousands of inhabitants were killed, the women raped, the children not spared. Edward had to bring the French nobles to battle, but he knew his opponent, King Philip of Valois, would place two or three times more warriors in his way. The English army advanced through Normandy leaving a trail of fire behind, and then moving to Paris. It stopped at Poissy, in reach of the walls of Paris, but passed the Seine and marched northward. The English reached the Somme River, now pursued by the strong feudal army of France. King Edward managed to cross the Somme at the Passage of Blanche-Taque beneath Abbeville, and he set up camp near the small town of Crécy-en-Ponthieu. His army then amounted to about ten thousand to twelve thousand men, but the French army that caught up with him indeed consisted of three times as many knights and men-at-arms, at least thirty thousand men.

On Saturday, twenty-six August of 1346, late in the afternoon, the French forces still arriving, the armies clashed. The French nobles launched fifteen successive attacks, but all attacks were quenched by the English archers who stood to the right and left in the English royal army. King Edward fought on foot with his warriors, protected on his flanks by his archers, as he had done at Halidon Hill against the Scots. The French attacks lasted on in the darkness of the night. By then, the fields in front of the English were littered with the bodies of dead knights. The English had broken the impulsive charges of the French cavalry. King Philip, wounded by an arrow in the neck, was riding to Amiens with his court, a few companions. More than fifteen hundred knights and lords of France had been killed, among them the count of Alençon, the counts of Blois, Auxerre, Blamont, Salm, Sancerre, Harcourt, Saint-Pol, and the duke of Lorraine. The blind King John of Bohemia had been slain. John of Bohemia was also count of Luxemburg, and a staunch supporter of France. Equally slain was Count Louis of Nevers, the count of Flanders. The heir of Flanders, the fifteen year old Louis of Male, reached Amiens the next day, wounded, but able to walk and ride. The English, unaware of their vast victory, slept in their positions, exhausted and spent, expecting new attacks of the French in the morning, but realising in the rising fog the extent of the casualties they had inflicted on the French army. Count Louis of Nevers would henceforth be called by some Louis of Crécy, but he lay dead in front of the English lines.

King Edward ordered his army to Calais, which he reached on the fourth of September. Calais was strongly defended by a French garrison under the command of Jean de Vienne, a Burgundian knight. The English troops passed the winter of 1346 to 1347 in front of the city and gradually, King Edward built up his army to over thirty thousand men. This army consisted also of several thousand Flemish militiamen, which had been assembled in Flanders by Hugh Hastings while King Edward had been marching to Crécy. The Flemish

warriors took no real part in the siege of Calais as such, but they forced a campaign in the north of France, weakening the French garrisons in the country.

The urge to plunder and ransoming in the country of Calais was great, so the English and Flemish armies destroyed numerous villages and small towns in the region.

A large English fleet blockaded the harbour of Calais by the sea, preventing supplies to be brought in.

Philip of Valois marched with another army to relieve Calais in July of 1347. Philip had assembled a new army already in March of that year. Although the French king set up camp very near the English, he feared a new defeat.

Bad news also came to Philip from Brittany. After the middle of June, the army of five thousand warriors of Charles de Blois had been defeated in a night assault at La Roche-Derrien by a much smaller army of a mere thousand English warriors led by Sir Thomas Dagworth. The war also went badly for the French King in Gascony, where large regions had been lost to the English.

Philip of Valois refused to give battle in the marshy terrain of Calais to Edward. He rode off on the second of August.

The garrison of Calais tore apart the French banners, burned them, and surrendered the next day, on the fourth of August. King Edward refrained from sacking and burning the precious harbour. He merely demanded six important citizens of Calais to submit to him, dressed in long, white shirts, walking barefoot, and wearing halters and chains around their necks. King Edward ordered the men to be beheaded, but Queen Philippa knelt to her husband and begged to save the knights and prominent men of Calais from being executed. Edward gave in.

King Philip of Valois returned to Paris, and asked for a truce with England. King Edward's army was equally exhausted from the long siege. He accepted the proposal.

The truce signed by King Edward and King Philip on the twenty-eighth of September 1347, was to last until a fortnight after the Day of Saint John the Baptist, until July the ninth of 1348, being binding for all belligerent parties, for England and France and for the forces of the Low Countries. The truce also included Scotland and Flanders. For Flanders, however, all banished *Leliaert* knights were still forbidden to enter the country under pain of losing all their possessions. Despite their enmity to France, the Flemish merchants were allowed to freely carry out their buying and selling in France.

King Edward embarked on a series of feasts in his kingdom. Many tournaments were organised, in several cities of the realm. England feasted. The reputation of Edward III as a great king soared. On the eleventh of October 1347, Emperor Lewis of Bavaria died. So magnificent was the fame of Edward, that the electors of Germany chose Edward to become the successor to Lewis as Holy Roman Emperor. King Edward turned the offer down, probably because his finances were low again, maybe because the task of reigning over England and the empire plus wage a war in France would be too much for his resources, force and power.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the beginning of August of 1346, the Flemish urban forces had moved south and west, accompanied by the English men-at-arms and archers of Sir Hugh Hastings. They arrived at the borders of Arras, attacking Saint-Venant and besieging Béthune. French troops resisted

them. The Flemish were driven back, retreated, and then, disheartened, they returned to Ghent, Bruges and Ieper at the end of August, but only after having heard of King Edward's great victory at Crécy.

When in September, Edward III moved unhindered to Calais, the English besieging the town, the Flemish forces marched out again, under the command of Henry of Flanders, to join their forces with the English. Among their troops went four thousand warriors from Ghent. King Edward, however, did not want these men in his camp at Calais, fearing some of the troops might hold him responsible for the death of their Count Louis de Nevers. The Flemish turned back and devastated the regions between Saint-Omer and Boulogne. They defeated a strong French force led by the bishop of Thérouanne, and took that town, burning it down. The Flemish also captured Ruhout and they besieged Arques. They turned home soon, urged by King Edward to do so. The forces sent by Ghent on this rather vain expedition were back in their city at the beginning of October.

King Edward III could henceforth more rely on Calais as a bridgehead into France than on Flanders or any other ally of his in the Low Countries.

The three main cities of Flanders were once again very low in money from having sent many warriors to assist King Edward in his campaign after Crécy. The antagonisms between the cities, the partisans of the count, the *Leliaert* knights supporting the king of France and the guilds in the cities continued unabated. In May of 1347, a few of the banished noblemen even took revenge by killing the former *ruwaard* of Flanders, Simon van Halen-Mirabello.

## Count Louis of Male

Louis of Male, the son of Louis of Nevers, count of Flanders, fled from the battlefield of Crécy late in the night, dressed in full armour, seriously wounded in the leg and at the side, splattered with – mostly his own – coagulated blood. He had thrown off his shield and discarded his long lance already at the beginning of the battle, considering it totally useless in the middle of the battle where he had fought. His squire had been lost, slain by an English battle-axe. A few knights, friends of his from the court of Flanders, and the standard-bearer of the county, rode with him. A knight who knew more or less the lay of the land led. The man, though also fully armoured, rode fast in the dark, first east and then south. They rode unescorted, unaware of what had happened to the other knights of Flanders. No doubt many of these men had been slaughtered, transpierced by the clouds of arrows that had fallen upon them.

Louis counted only five knights plus the standard-bearer, not more armed men followed. They could have driven their horses even faster but for the night that had poured its black veil over the land. They had only the moon to light them on. Louis supposed a long journey lay before him, and his heart was weary, for his father, the count of Flanders, had been slain on the battlefield. His father's body had to be abandoned, transpierced by English arrows despite his armour of the finest steel that could be forged in the county. The count's corpse could not be recuperated, for the English had advanced, and so the count could not be brought to the French camp.

All was lost, the hour then already late, escape urgent. The continuance of the house of Flanders, Nevers and Rethel had to be saved. When Louis of Male had shouted he wanted to

charge anew, two of the knights of the court of Flanders had grabbed the reins of his horse and forced him backwards. They had seen what Louis had not yet realised, the ignominious defeat of the royal French army. Had not the king already left the battlefield also? Louis sat firmly on his destrier, bare headed, only a long sword at his side. He was fifteen years old, nearing sixteen, a strong boy, well-muscled, dexterous with the sword and the battle-axe, a proud knight in tournaments, but now he was scared. He feared English knights and hordes of enemy men-at-arms might as yet capture him and his small group of Flemish knights. Worse, he feared falling into the hands of mounted English archers. The knights who rode next to him, protecting him, assured him that would not happen. They were far from Crécy already! Fighting was still going on by then in the fields of Crécy, the English were engaged by the assaults of the last French battles, but Louis had been convinced also that the main battle was lost. Louis rode off hastily, to the example of the French King Philip of Valois. He and his knights saw nothing far in front of them, however. Nobody knew where the king had fled to. Many castles lay in the environs. The Flemish knights did not deem those fortresses secure for their young lord. They spoke French, but might easily be mistaken for English raiders. The only safe place for them was the city of Amiens, the walled city where the fleeing French army would be regrouping around the defeated king.

Late in the night, the men reined in their horses near a small wood where they slept for two hours, setting up guard to watch the road. They slept with their backs against the trunks of the trees, sitting on the damp grass and fallen leaves. Close to dawn they rode on, red-eyed from fatigue. They had to ask for the road to the town several times, and were convinced at least once a wrong road had been indicated to them. They arrived in Amiens near noon. They were allowed to enter the city at the sight of the standard of Flanders, and settled in the house of the counts of Flanders. The town was in utter chaos, knights and men-at-arms filling the streets. Inside the rooms, Louis could step out of his armour, which he had to undo himself, find old but decent clothes, bathe and rest. He was served by his lords and the two elder servants of the house. For the first time since three days, he felt in relative safety. Yesterday, during the battle, he had been horrified, fearing for his life. Louis of Male and his court slept again for a few hours.

Late in the afternoon, one of the knights of Flanders ventured out and went for news in the town. He came back two hours later, announcing King Philip had equally arrived in Amiens and resided in his castle. The king of France had passed the night in the castle of Labroye and had then continued to Amiens with a substantial number of men-at-arms, gathered on the way. The battle had definitely been lost, though some argued the king had fled too soon. The English had not ridden in pursuit of the French court. The *Oriflamme*, the war banner of France, had been won by the English. Very many dukes and counts had been killed or taken prisoner in the disaster, but, God preserved, not the king.

The knights of Louis's following decided to remain a few days at Amiens.

Louis of Male sat on an unadorned chair in the small hall of the house. He felt not too well. His face was very pale. He was still tired and he had lost some blood, even while riding. A barber had closed his wounds, cleaned the dirt, put bandages on him, but Louis limped and his side hurt. His skin was scraped in several places from the weight of his armour. He ached at his shoulders, breast, leg, and tried to move as little as necessary.

The knights who stood around him, all out of armour now, needed to know what to do next. He was aware they waited for decisions coming from him. Louis acknowledged, as he had been taught by his mother, these men had to know what his aims were.

'Keep everybody busy at all times,' his mother had croaked to him. 'Act, think, ask for advice, but never show you do not know what to do in any circumstance. It is far better to

make a bad decision than to make no decision at all. Use your brains. Do the contrary of what your father does. When with knights, never forget you are their lord. Never allow them to take the ascendant over you!’

The issue was, Louis had no idea what to do next, except to flee on. Something better should be found! Was he not the new count of Flanders?

‘Where can we go to?’ Louis asked with a breaking voice, wondering why his knights had come to Amiens. Why not to Nevers or even to Flanders?

‘You are now the new count of Flanders, lord,’ Gerard van Gistel replied, ‘but you have not yet been daubed a knight and not yet paid your homage to the king of France. You are nothing for the moment, not even a knight. You are still young, many would ascertain you are too young to rule over Flanders. The king might be tempted to name a regent for Flanders, one of his own men. It is adamant we follow the king and have you installed as count as fast as possible, despite your age. We must exploit the shock of the king. Maybe also, the king intends to regroup his army and attack the English once more before they can retreat and reorganise.’

‘I doubt the French will attack again,’ Louis dared to contradict van Gistel, one of the greatest names of Flanders. ‘We have been defeated, severely defeated. I have seen counts fall. Thousands of the king’s knights have been killed. The army has no stomach to fight again after what happened yesterday. What will happen to my father’s body?’

‘Your father shall be recognised. He wears the badge of Flanders on his chest. Even the English shall honour him. Once we know a little more about what is happening next, we shall ride to the English army and hope to see to it that your father receives a decent burial. You should of course not ride to the English, for you would be captured. One of us will have to go.’

‘Fine! I don’t need a regent. I suggest one of you now go to the French court and announce my presence. Negotiate for my homage. Negotiate the homage for me to be accepted as knight of France and count of Flanders. What then?’

‘You are not only count of Flanders by inheritance. You are also count of Nevers and Rethel. We must have those lands officially secured for you and handed over to you by the king. Again, your homage to him shall be appreciated, for the Flemish cities side rather with the English. Then, you should visit those counties and have the nobles, at least the most important ones, kneel before you and recognise you as their lord.’

‘That should be easy. The situation in Flanders is not that simple, isn’t it?’

‘Not in Flanders, no. Nothing is ever simple in Flanders!’ van Gistel shook his head. ‘You will have the unrestricted support of the lords of the castellanies, of course, and also of the knights in the cities, but you will need to be accepted as lord by the aldermen of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, and by the Flemish parliament.’

‘All right. First, I have to be ordained count,’ Louis decided. ‘Then somebody should prepare my arrival in Flanders. I cannot just ride into the county, ride into the cities that are still allied to England, and tell them I am their new count now, and they have to obey me, even though I fought against their allies. I should find some way to reconcile them with me. My father never could quite get the cities to his side, couldn’t he? I must succeed in what he could not accomplish, however hard that may be. If I simply ride to Flanders, the militia of the cities might grab me and hand me over to England for ransom. My coming must be prepared. May I suggest you, lord van Gistel, take two of our knights with you and ride to Flanders to prepare my coming? I want to be the true count of Flanders, not just count in title and name. I must know whether I can be received peacefully. I shall want to speak to the aldermen of the three

main cities. Tell them I will honour all the existing charters, and if necessary, negotiate for some new charters between the cities and me. That should take some time. Where can I stay in the meantime?’

‘Not in Flanders, for too dangerous,’ van Gistel warned. ‘The castle of Male cannot be defended from an attack by the militia. You could travel to one of your castles in France, join your mother at Conflans, maybe, near Paris.’

‘No, for heaven’s sake,’ Louis grinned. ‘Spare me my mother! I have no taste for seeing my mother so soon. I could not ride to Nevers or Rethel too, for she would arrive wherever I am in no time. I should also leave some distance between me and France, not give the impression to the Flemish cities I have fled to France, as my father did so often. I won’t hide!’

‘We have been negotiating your marriage to Margaret of Brabant,’ van Gistel suggested. ‘You might travel to Brabant under the pretext you wanted to get acquainted with your possible future bride. You could stay for a few weeks in a castle of Brabant, near Flanders, to recover from your wounds. You would be saved from the loving arms of your mother, and yet be near to Flanders, though not in the county. Brabant is not anymore allied to England, not really, anyhow, and she has sought contact with France but she is also not really allied to King Philip. Brabant is part of the Holy Roman Empire of Germany, not of France. The Flemish cities may appreciate the fact you preferred a rather neutral county to recover in, rather than in France. I could use that as a sign of a new mentality in the negotiations.’

Louis sighed, reflected for an instant on Brabant.

‘Yes! It is about time, isn’t it, I laid my eyes upon Margaret. I need some rest, though my wounds are not as important as you seem to believe. But I could have a fine doctor look me over, and friendly hands caress me.’

Louis grinned, and van Gistel threw his hands in the air. This count was still a boy, he chuckled!

‘I like your ideas, lord van Gistel,’ Louis continued. ‘You have been a loyal, trustful, honest friend and the finest servant of our cause, as ever. I shall not forget you. So, you ride to Flanders, but only after the king has given me the county. Then, I will surrender to the love of Margaret of Brabant and to her father. You, Boudin of Auberchicourt, would be a fine envoy, French knight as you are, well, almost, to try and seek audience with the French king and ask him or his court to hand me over my legal heritage. I want no regent. I will pledge to do homage to the French king, but not just yet. Ask Louis de Namur to ride to the English and arrange for my father to be placed in a decent tomb in the environs. Later, I shall want to transfer his remains to Flanders. I want my father to be buried in a church of Bruges. The counts of Flanders should rest forever in fair Flanders, not elsewhere. His presence should consolidate our claim on the county and on the cities.’

The knights of Flanders nodded. More than one of them noted with some surprise the boy-count was commanding them, without hesitation. They had not met the young count often, for he had mostly stayed with his mother in France, in his mother’s castles. They noticed he was breaking free from his mother, now. Other knights considered it not at all astonishing to be ordered by a boy. They did not see the youth of the count. They saw their lord, the count of the richest county in the French realm, and would obey him.

Only the lord of Edingen sat grinning broadly, not far from the count. Edingen had been a friend of Louis for years. He knew Louis well. Louis remarked the grin.

‘Edingen, wipe that nasty grin from your face! Please help me up and walk me to my room, will you?’ Louis asked. ‘I need to rest and I need to talk with you about all this. I would like something to eat in my room, also only with you, please!’

Edingen heard the questions, which were orders, too. He leapt to help Louis from his chair.

On the way to the room, Edingen remarked, ‘you have done that quite well. Your knights know what to do, now. We are back on our way. All will fall nicely into order, lord.’

‘I think behaving that way was my duty,’ Louis grinned back at Edingen. ‘I was scared shit from the first moment to the last. They might have pushed me in a dark corner and have chosen a regent among themselves!’

‘So, you are going to rest and recover in the arms of Margaret of Brabant,’ Edingen posted.

‘I am,’ Louis grinned.

‘Who knows, you may even get an opportunity to hump the maid, as a matter of learning how she is in bed once you’re married!’

Louis was shocked, dropped his spoon, ‘but that would not be very appropriate, wouldn’t it?’

‘Appropriate not, no,’ Edingen agreed.

They both laughed, roaring.

Louis of Male was a handsome boy, a youth still, but who dared to speak as an adult. He had aged very suddenly, for he had seen the horrors of a real battle, seen his father killed and hundreds of men among his acquaintances maimed, wounded, left for death on the battlefield of Crécy. Edingen saw how tired the boy was. Louis’s dark, brown eyes sat deeper than usual, the skin around them hung thicker and redder. His rather thick lips were drawn to a line of determination, but they sometimes twitched in pain. Louis didn’t want to show how much he had been hurt in body and soul, but he limped in more than one way. Edingen knew the young Louis could be very authoritative, commanding when he wanted, even when he was shaken in his self-confidence, as today. The boy could play a role and feel otherwise. The new count could have people ply to his will, and Edingen chose not to try to restrain that will now, not when the boy’s father had been killed only hours ago, not when the knights in the house and Flanders entire needed a determined count, even if this a young count.

Louis guessed what Edingen was thinking of.

‘I can handle it,’ Louis assured. ‘Somebody must be in command!’

Edingen acquiesced to that. He continued grinning.

\*\*\*\*\*

On September the third of 1346, merely a few days after the Battle of Crécy, Louis of Male, fifteen years old, did homage to King Philip VI of Valois for his feudal fief of Flanders. King Philip daubed Louis to knight and handed formally over to the youth the county of Flanders. Philip of Valois had not hesitated in thus linking the son of Louis de Nevers, who would from then on also be called Louis of Crécy, to the crown of France and to his person. The king was astonished at how imposing the boy-count looked, but was his mother, Margaret of France, not a royal princess, the daughter of Philip the Tall, in blood connected to him? When Louis of Male advanced to the makeshift throne of Philip in the castle of Amiens, everybody present in the hall could pledge Louis had valiantly fought at the side of his father. The new count limped, held his side, was very pale in the face, but nevertheless went with his head proud and with eyes of fire. The courtiers knew very well how the young count had been torn from the battlefield by his knights, away from his dead father. The ladies at the court were ravished by the story of Louis’s courage and some of them regarded the boy already as a future prey. Would Louis not be one of the wealthiest knights of France?

One day later, three lords of Flanders rode to Menen, in territory of the county, but near the border with France, where they proposed to negotiate with representatives of the three main

cities for the count's return to his inherited lands. A delegation of the towns rode to Menen and began talks with the knights. In Flanders, nobody had claimed the position of James van Artevelde to lead the county, so Flanders had remained without a true leader, and even the most determined opposers of the authority of the count had to acknowledge that Flanders needed to be led, if only in form. The negotiations of Menen lasted for more than a month, for there was much to be discussed, but in the end the cities accepted Louis II as their count and leader, as far as he promised to uphold the privileges of the towns. An agreement was reached in late October. Louis of Male could enter the territory of Flanders without having to fear the towns would take him, and throw him in prison. The aldermen of the city sighed with pleasure too, for legality could be restored completely.

Meanwhile, Louis of Male rested and healed from his wounds in the Brabant castle of Tervuren, a small town between Brussels and Leuven. Tervuren was a castle of Duke John III of Brabant. John had generously agreed to provide sanctuary to Count Louis, but the duke of course still had been calculating, hoping his daughter Margaret could marry this young boy who was already count.

John's three daughters were dear to him. Joanna of Brabant, his eldest daughter of twenty-four, had been married to Count William IV of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, but William had been killed two years ago at the Battle of Warns on the border of Friesland. John was looking for another marriage for this daughter, and he was eyeing the house of Luxemburg, which was turned to the empire. Joanna was too old for Louis of Male, and overtures had already been made to the Luxemburgs.

Mary, his youngest daughter, twenty-one, was promised to Reginald, Count of Guelders. She would be married soon.

His second daughter then, Margaret, was twenty-three, still quite older than Count Louis, but she was a nice, somewhat effaced, quiet child though strong-willed. Negotiations to marry Louis with Margaret had been going on for some months already, begun by John and Louis de Nevers. Louis of Male would be a fine husband for Margaret.

John III wanted to secure his frontiers by these marriages of his daughters. He had nevertheless no illusions his girls would stand in the way of their husbands, his future son-in-laws, in case of conflicts. When the princes of his neighbouring lands wished to cut pieces from his duchy, they would do so, married or not to his daughters. He hoped the girls could yet exert some influence on their husbands. Joanna had been married to Hainault, Holland and Zeeland; Marie would soon be wed to Guelders. With a marriage to Flanders, John III surmised his frontiers would relatively be stabilised. In the event his sons would die young, he did not doubt his son-in-laws would wage war on each other and divide the duchy among them. He would have to arrange something to avoid such bloodshed, probably with the help of the emperor of Germany.

John of Brabant wondered whether Margaret would not be too old for the young count of Flanders, who would only be sixteen by the twenty-fifth of October of the year, but he assumed it was rather Louis of Male who could teach a few matters of life to his daughter. He had heard rumours Louis had inherited the hot blood of his father. Louis of Male walked still around in some pain in the castle of Tervuren, so John thought he could send his wife, Mary of Evreux with their daughter Margaret also to Tervuren, to make sure the boy got better and became well disposed towards Brabant. Louis might talk to Margaret, notice how fine a woman she was. The young people might learn to know each other and be comfortable in each other's company. John would not be so cruel as to have the two young people marry while detesting each other's guts. Marriages between counts and daughters of dukes were

matters of state, not of affection, but unfit marriages could become nasty. John did not wish that for his daughters!

Margaret was a tall woman, not unattractive, learned, maybe a little too pious, but hot-headed and stubborn as her father was. Louis would have mistresses and bastards, but nothing was more normal, would prove the vigour of the house, and should not stand in the way of a fruitful marriage. John prepared a handsome dowry.

The castle of Tervuren was an elegant building, set in an idyllic environment. It was completely surrounded by broad extents of water, for it had been erected centuries ago on a piece of land where the rivers Voer and Maelbeek flowed into each other. One arrived in the castle by riding over a high bridge that ended in a drawbridge. This was the main entrance, but another, smaller drawbridge on the right side of the castle led to a fine garden, grown and designed on the other side of the main entrance and on the other side of the promontory formed by the two rivers. The Voer was so large in places around the castle, that Louis could watch fishermen throwing out their nets in the river and catch fine fishes, some of which would find their way to the platters of the castle.

The walls of Tervuren Castle stood particularly high. The walls held living quarters, a chapel and stables around an inner courtyard. Six barbican towers, round, high and massive, protected the access to the walls, and the chapel was built as a prolongation of one such towers. The only open place from where one had a fine view over the surrounding landscape and over the garden was by a lower wall, next to the chapel. Otherwise, all walls were actually formed by the windowed rear façades of the manors, the many living quarters. The rooms had high ceilings of finely carved wooden beams and they were lavishly decorated with the most beautiful tapestries of Brussels. Louis did not try to count all the windows, turrets and chimneys that adorned the walls and the roofs. He compared the castle to his own palace of Male, and had to grant Tervuren was larger and grander.

Louis became impressed by the splendour of the Brabant court. He felt also impressed by Margaret. She was a kind, reserved woman, always extremely polite with him, not arrogant at all, inquiring regularly about his health. He remarked she showed a lot more zeal than he himself could feel for all religious matters. She liked to attend holy mass each day. She was also fine company for interesting conversations on very many subjects. Margaret had a dry sort of humour, no sarcasm. She showed respect and patience with the so much younger Louis, and she talked to him with deference and affection. Yes, Louis might easily marry a woman such as Margaret. He would be proud to wed this sophisticated lady, have her at his side and have her advise him on matters of importance of state. Margaret was intelligent and knew very well the affairs of Brabant, Flanders and other counties. She could read Latin and Greek, spoke French and had learned to speak and understand the Flemish of Brussels, which she proved to Louis in a very pretty accent that made Louis smile. Louis was quite younger than Margaret, but at sixteen he was about as tall as Margaret was. She talked a lot with him about her two sisters and her parents; She expected Joanna to inherit Brabant after her brothers.

Louis was not in love, but he found Margaret extremely beddable. Maybe he already wanted to tear down some of the ascendance she held over him because of her age, her greater maturity in matters of the world.

Louis of Male did envy Duke John of Brabant for the fine castle of Tervuren, and for the splendour of the duke's court, over which ruled Margaret as well as her mother, Marie d'Evreux. He exceedingly found his own castle of Male small and insignificant. He told Margaret he would have to do something with his castle in the future, almost apologising to

her for being unable to present her in rude but wealthy Flanders something better than Tervuren.

Louis of Male remained at Tervuren only about one month. The negotiators with the three main cities of Flanders had progressed well. The aldermen welcomed the presence of the count in Flanders. It was arranged for Louis to visit the towns as of early November. Arrangements had already been made for Louis to start with a joyous entry into the smaller town of Kortrijk. Louis understood the smaller town had been chosen to serve as rehearsal for his entries into the larger cities. He would perceive immediately whether he would be welcomed warmly or coldly in Flanders.

All went well in Kortrijk. Count Louis and his knights rode in procession to the town, were received solemnly at the main gate and were handed over the symbolic keys to the inner city from out of the hands of a pretty young girl, all the aldermen standing smiling behind. Thereafter, the knight-*poorters* and the aldermen of the town, the deans of the guilds and representatives of the wealthiest families formed a procession. A large escort of militiamen followed them into town, riding between two tight-packed lanes of cheering townsmen, women and children. Louis rode and proceeded to the market place, near the Belfort. A huge crowd had assembled in the square. The people cheered and waved. Louis was surprised. He had heard his father tell how rough and uncivilised his subjects of Flanders could be. Here, he saw elegantly dressed men and women come to greet him warmly. Never-ending banquets were organised in his honour, during which the most delicious food was presented on silver platters. The men who sat at his table talked to him in the best French he had heard only around Paris. He liked the down-to-earth, direct, quick conversations of the merchants and deans of the town. Heard he not here how his mother had taught him to converse, politely but clearly, without afterthoughts, in a no-nonsense way of speech, in honestly felt and open speech.

‘Yes,’ Louis reflected, ‘my people can be straightforward and rude in speech as compared to the sinuous phrases of the French court, but when these men talk about a fish, they name the beast and they don’t turn around the pot thrice in the nicest of bombastic words. Why did my father not agree with these men? What went wrong?’

Louis, of course, also liked the women. He eyed more than one full-bosomed, thin-waisted, wide-hipped voluptuous Flemish Madonna. The Flemish girls were well-fed, he noticed, quickly to laugh, generous, luxurious in the flesh, many blond of hair, blue-eyed and pink-cheeked, always happy, forgiving a pinch and flirtatious as any French woman of the Parisian court. Count Louis the Young obtained much more attention here from the ladies than at the French court, and that too pleased him.

In Kortrijk, Louis was welcomed like a king. He truly was the lord of the region and he felt recognised as such.

Louis of Male left Kortrijk in the most excellent mood. He rode to Ghent, where he arrived on the twelfth November of 1346. Ghent would be his next challenge! How would he be received in the largest town of Flanders? Was it not mostly a Ghent hat counts were made and unmade?

\*\*\*\*\*

In the city of Ghent too, young Count Louis of Male was welcomed at the gate by the aldermen of the Keure. Once more the count rode into the town at the head of his court knights. He had heard how large Ghent was, and he had been here when still a child, but his

memories had faded. The town now impressed him as no other. He basked in the attention and enthusiasm of the inhabitants. The people cheered. Louis was so young, so handsome, looked vulnerable but happy. The women fought the tears in their eyes when they thought of the boy's father killed so recently and at his side. Louis felt grateful. He wondered why his knights had told him much had to be done before he might be accepted by the cities as their rightful lord. The people loved him! The *Gentenaars* showed openly how much they cherished him. They showed no doubt, no reticence in acknowledging him as their lord. Why would he have refused them their liberties, their privileges? Had not the charters also guaranteed the wealth of the country, the count's wealth, and peace for the towns?

While riding through the streets of Ghent, despite the cold and despite the icy wind that tore at his cloak, Louis considered the warmth of the feelings the people of Ghent proved to him, and he began to reflect on what he wanted from life. Was it not important to wish everybody well, prosperity, peace and happiness? He was wealthy, he was handsome, he was smart, and he owned vast territories among which the greatest jewel on earth, Flanders. What more did he need?

So far, he had only heard one complaint being formulated in Kortrijk. Kortrijk was a smaller town, one of several in the quarter of Ghent. The aldermen there wanted a higher share in the cloth industry and hence profits from the making of cloth of better quality. James van Artevelde and his regime of the three members of Flanders, the cities of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper, had ferociously suppressed the making of quality cloth in the smaller cities. The aldermen of Kortrijk wanted this oppression to stop. Louis did not understand the issue well. He would need more information. Quality cloth sold easily, the men of Kortrijk had told him during the banquet. Why not produce more of it, also in the smaller cities. More merchants could look for more markets, extend the wealth of Flanders. More men would become rich in Flanders, and more cloth sold meant more taxes, so the count would benefit too. Louis thought he would have to discuss the issue with aldermen of the larger cities, foremost of Ghent, and hear their arguments. He was cautious, though. His mother had urged him to remain cautious in all circumstances, to not decide on half information. Yes, he would have to ask many people about this subject. But if he talked, rumours might spread, actions attributed to Louis he hadn't even initiated yet. To whom could he talk very discreetly about the issues at hand? He did not doubt the problem was very intricate and sensitive.

Lost in such thoughts, but waving to left and right, Count Louis of Male arrived in the Saint-Veerle Place and at the *Gravensteen*. Before that, he had endured many speeches in the huge Friday Market. He had been bored, but he had spoken too, for a short time, assuring the people of Ghent of his affection and guaranteeing already to uphold the charters of the town. When he was brought now to the *Gravensteen*, Louis involuntarily shuddered. He had rarely seen a darker, uglier monster. It was a good thing he only had to reside here for a few days. He made a mental resolve to seek a more suitable place to stay in the next time he came to Ghent, for this fortress looked too much as the stronghold of a cruel, vengeful devil. No, this was not the image he wanted his people of Ghent to know him by! The one living inside this *Gravensteen* told to his people he was afraid of them, and the *Gravensteen* meant a perpetual menace to the people outside. This castle gave all the wrong messages!

Louis dismounted in the inner yard, and then he disappeared into the rooms that had been prepared for him. He liked more the interior of the *Gravensteen*. He noticed the halls and the rooms were finely decorated with some sophistication in the choice of tapestries and furniture. After all, what the *Gravensteen* first offered was safety, and that was a quality Count Louis could appreciate too.

Although the castle was filled with friends, with the knights and ladies of his court, the count felt lonely. He longed for the tender company of a sweet woman such as Margaret of Brabant. Yes, he should marry soon, have monsters such as this resonate with the shouts and laughter of children! He asked the lord of Gistel how long he would have to stay in Ghent. The answer was four days, after which the count would have to visit other towns of Flanders. The months of November and December had been reserved for the visits.

Louis of Male sighed. He would have preferred to put on commoners' clothes, a hood over his hair, and gone exploring Ghent at ease, discovering its rivers, canals, monuments, churches and abbeys. Well, he could come back and do that another time. A banquet was organised in the evening at the *Bijloke* Abbey. He would be the centre of all attention, barely have a minute to himself. Still, he longed for the moments he could be alone, though he would have preferred spending that time with a loving person.

Louis thought of Margaret of Brabant. He wanted to send a gift to Margaret and to her mother, to thank them for having received him so graciously at Tervuren and have helped him so sweetly to recover from his wounds. He went to the door of his room, called his steward, and asked for the best goldsmith of Ghent to present to him some of the man's finest jewels. Then, Louis dressed for the celebrative banquet at the *Bijloke*.

On the third day of his stay in the *Gravensteen* of Ghent, Count Louis of Male found a little time to receive a goldsmith of Ghent. The best goldsmith was a man called John de Smet. John had been waiting for at least two hours in the count's ante-chamber for Louis to find some time to see him. John wore a large, wooden box in which he had a large piece of green velvet and the pieces of jewellery the count's steward had asked him to present to the count. He had made the jewels by his own hands. No assistant had touched these masterpieces. Some jewels were quite new, others, the most precious and expensive ones, he had in his workshop since many months. To help him present the jewels, John had brought his daughter Heyla with him.

John de Smet and his daughter were ushered in, not into the great hall of the *Gravensteen*, but brought to a smaller room adjoining the private apartment of the count. The count was not in the room when John and Heyla entered. John took two candelabras from the oak table, placing them on top of an ancient, darkened oak chest on a corner. He spread the green velvet cloth on the table and began to display the contents of his box. He placed the most intricately forged golden and silver jewels nearest to the front side of the table, the larger pieces further off. Heyla continued this fine work. John showed heavy necklaces of gold thread and precious stones, ceremonial pieces, and lighter necklaces set with pearls and smaller gems, more suited for the necks of ladies. Heyla placed the brooches, earrings, bracelets, and also some larger pieces such as candelabras and church cups. They did not really know what the count wished. The word had been given Louis wanted a gift for a lady. John and Heyla presented their best pieces.

While they were still taking out the jewels and placing them on the table, Louis of Male opened the door in the rear. John and Heyla bowed. Count Louis did not give them much attention at first. He went straight for the table and looked at the displayed jewels. The gold and the stones sparkled in the light. Louis stood without a word of welcome. He looked at the glistening stones, at the intricate patterns of the gold-and silver thread. His attention grew. John de Smet remarked the count was astonished. Louis fingered a few pieces, took one up, turned it, laid it down again, and returned to another piece. He seemed genuinely surprised. John felt proud, he stretched his back. He knew no master goldsmith of any town in Flanders could make such splendid jewels. The count had recognised the finest of works!

Louis of Male looked up from the table, wanting to say something to John de Smet, but before he could open his mouth he stopped and stared at Heyla. John saw Louis's eyes sparkle as bright as the stones on the table, then his lips twitched. Louis drew his eyes a moment to John and then the count stared again at Heyla. A few awkward moments followed, Louis and Heyla just staring at each other, saying nothing. John felt ill at ease. What was happening?

The count tore his eyes away from Heyla, back to the green cloth, asking, 'are these your own pieces, Master goldsmith, or did you buy them from other jewellers?'

John scraped his throat. 'All the jewels are my own work exclusively, lord. I made them, no assistant has touched these. I made them in my workshop of Ghent.'

The count turned to face John de Smet and scrutinised him. John feared for a moment the count would call him a liar, but then Louis smiled.

He asked, 'what is your name, master?'

'My name is John de Smet. I live in the *Veldstraat* of the *kuipe*, lord.'

'Who is the lovely young lady you brought with you?'

The count was once more looking at Heyla, who stood now somewhat to the side. She was dressed in her best clothes, but modestly covered in subdued colours. She wore a dark brown simple gown, girdled at the agonisingly thin waist with a loop of gold braid, which emphasised her superb figure. Louis of Male's eyes went wider open.

'I present to you my daughter Heyla, lord. Heyla de Smet!'

'Yes, I am glad to make you acquaintance, master, as well as your daughter.'

Louis of Male turned his eyes again to Heyla and lingered. His face showed then a deep blush, but became rapidly very pale, as before. He did not tear his eyes away from Heyla. The count seemed to have lost interest for the jewels.

He said, 'it seems to me, Master John, in all honour, your greatest jewel is not on the table but standing next to it!'

Louis of Male blushed again then, realised he should not have given the compliment, and so he stared back at the jewels.

'Master John,' Louis begged John closer to the table, 'you show me here some of the finest masterpieces in gold and stones I have ever set my eyes on. Even in Paris, these pieces would be considered among the finest in the city. I would like to buy them all, but you placed a fortune on the table. I would like to buy a piece for a noble lady, to thank her for the kind attention she gave me. Which piece would you propose yourself?'

'The necklace, here, is fine, not heavy, lord. I worked a long time at it, started it all over twice. The work of the thread is particularly pretty and elegant, I believe.'

John presented the necklace to the count.

'It is, master,' Louis of Male agreed. 'I remarked it already. It is a miracle of workmanship, I have to agree. I'll take it, with my thanks and admiration for your work. I'll remember you, Master John!'

'As a real nice attention, this brooch too is elegant. The stones are expensive, but rare.'

John presented a large brooch on which several large, green precious stones had been set. The stones shone marvellously. The count picked up the brooch, looked at how fine the work on the gold thread was, how nicely the stones had been arranged. He held the brooch up to the light from the windows, let the emeralds turn and the rays play on their almost transparent surfaces. The brooch was in a long, unusually oval form. He turned the brooch to Heyla de Smet.

A knight entered the room.

'Lord, we have to hurry. The aldermen are waiting for us!'

Louis of Male waved the knight dismissively out. John de Smet placed two more exquisite pieces on the table.

‘No, no, Master John! You are tempting me too much. How much do the necklace and the brooch cost?’

John gave the price. Louis of Male sniffed and drew up his eyebrows, smiled.

‘I find that a high price, master, but it is the right price. The jewels are priceless, but not too expensive. I shall take the necklace and the brooch, and also the other necklace here, the heavier one, and the candelabra. Make a good price for this all to my steward. He shall pay you.’

Louis found the price right indeed, less expensive even than in Paris, but he also calculated quickly the total cost of the fortune that glimmered and shone and tempted him on the table. He thought, ‘my God, this goldsmith has brought a large fortune to the table. If he has more jewels still in his workshop, I might well not be able to buy everything off him. What riches are hidden in this town? I have so much to learn! To whom can I talk and ask questions about the matters in Flanders? I do not trust my knights to know the real wealth of Flanders, of Ghent.’

Louis suddenly turned to Heyla, addressing her directly, ‘if you might chose, Jonkver Heyla, which piece would you chose for yourself?’

Heyla did not hesitate. She felt the young count had bought enough. She pointed to the brooch with the green stones he had bought already, the green stones set in complex patterns of gold thread, surrounded by silver and smaller, white stones. The green stones did not lustre well on the green cloth, so Heyla picked it up and placed it on her brown dress, so that the colours contrasted better. She stepped back into a ray of light. Louis of Male stared at Heyla and continued staring, not at the stones but at her eyes.

‘The stones match your eyes,’ he whispered, ‘your father must have made the brooch for you or have had you on his mind when he set these stones.’

John de Smet felt uneasy again.

He interrupted, ‘these chains are beautiful too, my lord. I also worked a long time at this piece. When you find the time, I would be glad to show you my workshop and explain how I make pieces such as this.’

‘Yes, I would quite like that,’ Louis replied.

Count Louis looked again at the table, then back to Heyla.

He sighed and said finally, ‘as I decided, I will take those pieces, Master John. I would like to meet you again, later.’

Louis hesitated and then continued, ‘can you please be discreet about my buying these pieces? You are such an extraordinary craftsman. I feel you should know this piece, here, the necklace, shall go to the duchess of Brabant, Marie d’Evreux. The finer necklace is for her daughter, Margaret of Brabant. The brooch shall remain a private piece and the candelabra I shall keep on my own table.’

Louis lingered for yet a moment, then he said, ‘I will tell my knights about what a fine jeweller you are, Master de Smet. Thank you for having shown me these works of art. I have to go now. Goodbye, Jonkver Heyla.’

Louis of Male left the room, John and Heyla bowed to him.

While the count rushed out of the door, he remained in inner turmoil, not because he had made the honourable aldermen of Ghent wait for him, but because he had been touched by the beauty of Heyla de Smet.

‘Sweet Jesus,’ he thought, ‘this goldsmith’s girl is a beauty. Not just a beauty like any other, she is beauty incarnated. A painter or a sculptor might take her as a model for the Madonna.’

She must be around my age, maybe a little younger. What is happening to me? I tremble! Why would I like rushing back into that room and kiss her hands? Her face is perfect, flawlessly designed. Her full-blooded lips are so attractive and sensual! Her traits and fair skin are burnt into my mind, her figure flawless, her voice warm and husky. She must be intelligent, her gestures are slow but elegant and modest. She moves differently from all the girls I have met. And her eyes! Her eyes are green and limpid as the stones of the brooch I bought. She inspires probity and virtue. She holds her head as proudly as a princess, but with no grain of haughtiness! Would she be engaged to marry, is she already married, maybe? What am I going to do? I cannot marry a girl who is not noble. My marriage is an affair of the county, an arrangement in which I have practically no will. How could I be happy in my life without this girl? I have trouble remembering the face of Margaret of Brabant, fair though she is. This girl's eyes continue to burn in my mind.'

Louis's knights surrounded him. Together, Louis's mind still raging with the pains of love and passion, they walked solemnly into the hall where the aldermen of Ghent were waiting.

When the count stepped from the room where John de Smet had presented his jewels, Heyla de Smet helped her father put the pieces back in the chest, enveloped in the green cloth. Her cheeks still reddened, her hands trembled equally, and she also felt deeply touched by Louis's stare. She dared not look at her father. Count Louis had made a devastating impression on her. Heyla had not lost her heart to any boy until now. Here, she had suddenly realised she would always continue thinking about Louis of Male as the ideal young man. The boys she had ever met seemed insignificant compared to Louis of Male. She chided herself. She should not think of a count! How could she still fall in love with a common man after having met Louis of Male, the young count? She was also sad, for her destiny seemed closed and finished when Louis went out of the room.

When the box of the goldsmith had been closed, four pieces remained on the table. The count's steward told John he would pay immediately for the jewels, opening his purse, counting golden Florins, and he announced the count had wanted to provide an escort of two men-at-arms to accompany John de Smet and his daughter safely to their shop. When John de Smet protested, saying the escort was not necessary, the steward repeated the count had ordered so. The steward told the count would not tolerate the goldsmith and his daughter to run any risk, and orders had to be executed. The steward paid John in full, and called two guards in armour to accompany John de Smet and his daughter Heyla. They drew not a little attention in the streets of Ghent when they walked to the *Veldstraat*, one armed man in the yellow-and-black livery of the counts of Flanders on their right and another one on their left.

Count Louis of Male rode the next day out of Ghent, fast, early at dawn, and escorted by fifty knights and men-at-arms of the militia of Ghent. He visited many other towns of Flanders and was received everywhere in triumph. Flanders welcomed the young count enthusiastically. His youth and his sadness for the death of his father accompanied him and opened the hearts of the people to him. They saw a young count, happily smiling, and the people thought such an amiable youth could not but have a warm, sweet heart.

Two days after the count left Ghent, a young squire dressed elegantly in the yellow and black colours of Flanders entered the workshop of John de Smet in the *Veldstraat*. He was tired, dust had settled on his clothes and a horse stood in the street. He told he had come from the city of Bruges. He asked to see Jonkver Heyla de Smet. John was at work at that moment, sitting behind his table, placing a hot gold thread on a small plaque of silver. When the squire asked for Heyla, John already knew what was to come. He did not doubt the count wanted to meet with Heyla and make her his whore. Suddenly, his heart beat fast, but what could he do?

He had little faith in the honour of nobles. Only Heyla could refuse herself to the count. The family could flee from Ghent, escape to Brabant or Hainault or even father, and start a new life. John would then have to leave behind so many people and things he loved!

John told the squire to wait, and he called for Heyla. John went back to sit behind his table, seemingly unperturbed.

Heyla came in.

John told this was his daughter Heyla, and the squire said simply, ‘my lady, the Count Louis of Male ordered me to bring you this letter and parcel. I am not to wait for an answer.’

The squire bowed, greeted, bid a good afternoon, and immediately turned to step out of the workshop. Outside, he mounted on his horse and rode in the direction of the *Gravensteen*.

John saw Heyla open the package first. As he had expected but had it difficult to believe, Heyla showed a blush of surprise when she showed to her father the expensive golden brooch with the green stones Louis of Male had bought, the brooch she had told Louis she preferred. She danced around with the lovely jewel on her breast. John sighed.

Then, she opened the letter, which was of parchment, and she began to read out loud so that her father could hear.

*Dear Jonkver Heyla,*

*I wanted to keep this brooch because it reminded me of your wonderful eyes. I fear the stones burnt into my heart too strongly for me to bear. Please accept this gift from someone subdued already by your exquisite beauty. I hope we can meet again the next time I travel to near Ghent. I will see to it this will happen soon. You seem already to haunt my dreams for the rest of my life,*

*Louis.*

Heyla, who had never before looked at boys with other than innocent eyes, blushed scarlet when she read the passionate words.

She then brought the letter to her lips and, her head still bowed as if she were still reading, asked, ‘what am I to make of this, father?’

John de Smet sighed, placed his tools down and his golden thread, then he replied gently, ‘it seems to me, my darling, the count is smitten with your beauty. That is no wonder, for you are indeed the most delicate beauty of Ghent. I am afraid counts bed many women, promising them marvels. I have heard stories of the court and of the success this young count enjoys with the noble ladies of his court, other women with whom he may in one way or another be infatuated with. He is also bound to marry soon. I wonder whether he feels anything more for the women that flock around him but earthly lusts. The church and Jesus Christ, our Saviour, warn us for such feelings, which out of wedlock are sins. The count may forget all about you after a day or two, and that is very probably the best that could happen to us all. If he does not, we shall have to think about what to do with his urges. We can leave Ghent and build us another life far from our town. Marry you, the count shall never. Even if he wanted to, he couldn’t. He is the count of Flanders. He must marry the daughter of a king or a duke. At best, you could become his permanent whore, ready for him at his whim, and as easily forgotten as won. I am sorry to sound so harsh and heartless, but such is the life of a commoner, even if a *poorter* of Ghent, confronted with the great men of our lands. We should prepare to flee, but wait and hope Count Louis will have forgotten your little face within the week.’

‘He writes my eyes burn in his heart. He will not forget me. I am certain, father he won’t. What if his eyes still burn in my heart, father? What if what happened to us is far more serious than you can imagine?’

John looked up at his daughter, stood, thought, went to the other side of the table, trembling more. He stroke with his hand over the blond hair of Heyla, and she leaned her head to his breast. He embraced her. Father and daughter stood thus a long time in the workshop, expressing their tenderness and wondering at the fate of humans. John de Smet was very worried of course, even though he had prayed so much to God to preserve his daughter he had confidence God would provide for her and wish her well. He felt a sweet, unhappy sadness had taken possession of his daughter, the sadness he knew was genuine but young love, and who could fight love? It also seemed to him Heyla had suddenly been torn into the sorrows of the adult.

\*\*\*\*\*

Count Louis of Male returned to his castle of Male for the feasts of Christmas of 1346. In January of the next year, envoys of the three main cities arrived at Male. The aldermen of the cities walked arrogantly into his great hall, very aware of their power. They bowed respectfully to the young count. When the fine, long words of welcome had been exchanged, the first alderman of the *Keure* of Ghent spoke more solemnly and insistently. He reminded the count of Flanders the cities had vowed to an alliance with the king of England and France, Edward III. In the conflict between the kings, they had chosen the side of the rightful king of France, Edward.

Count Louis interrupted, stating he was aware of that alliance. He wondered, without saying anything about this aloud, when the Flemish cities would ask or force him to swear homage to Edward as king of France. Would the aldermen dare the effrontery of demanding him to swear loyalty to a man he had fought at Crécy, to the man who had killed his father? Luckily, the envoys had the presence of mind to leave matters stand between Louis of Male and Edward. The envoys came up with something else, as the spokesman of Ghent continued.

The aldermen proposed, ordered Louis to marry the eldest daughter of King Edward and Queen Philippa, the girl called Isabella of England, who was about a year and a half younger than Louis!

Louis of Male declined politely.

‘Marriage negotiations between me and the Lady Margaret of Brabant have been underway since many months,’ Louis protested. ‘I want to honour the wish of my royal mother and of my deceased father. Also, I find little honour and much shame in marrying the daughter of the man who has slain my father in battle!’

This was his cry of a desperate youth, but Louis noticed the hard faces of the knights and poorters of the cities, for whom no decency could prove to be of any value compared to the interests of the men who represented the vast power and wealth of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper. This was the first time the proposal was given to him, and Louis angrily refused with the stubbornness of youth, without much grace or patience. The Flemish knights of his court pressed him on. They too urged Louis to listen to the arguments of the three cities. How indeed, could Louis govern Flanders without the collaboration of the cities, wondered the wisest and most appreciated of his advisors, the lord of Gistel.

The representatives of the cities then talked of other matters and left the castle, but they returned in the next days. They spoke more insistently about the marriage with the English

princess, and then also dared to order Louis to accept Edward III formally as the rightful king of France. The horror of the demands made Louis shudder. He wanted to flee from Male, as his father had done so often, ride in one stretch to the castle of Tervuren in Brabant, hide with the duke and marry the duke's daughter. In a rare change of mood he decided to confront the aldermen each time they would present to him the matter of the marriage. At that moment, he did not want to leave Male.

Louis of Male, although cornered by the aldermen, rode to Ghent, accompanied by only two of his squires, without telling the court to where he travelled, and he rode dressed as any knight. He arrived at the *Gravensteen* unannounced, and ordered the bailiff not to tell the aldermen of the city he was at the castle. The bailiff had to explain only a knight of the entourage of the count had arrived. Then, Louis of Male sent one of his two squires with a message to the house of the goldsmith John de Smet in the *Veldstraat*.

\*\*\*\*\*

The letter and message was addressed to Heyla de Smet.

*Dear Jonkver Heyla,*

*I have temporarily returned to the castle. Can we meet again? If you feel any affection for me, we should talk. I do not want to force you. If you are inclined to the same sweet feelings as I, my messenger shall return to your father's home tomorrow evening, and then please either accompany him to my rooms, or refuse me the happiness of your presence. Yours dedicated*

*Louis.*

Heyla de Smet showed also this message to her father.

'You can refuse, as he offers,' John de Smet hoped. 'You can indeed refuse. You can choose for an honourable life, an honourable family. Louis of Male can only bring you a life of misery and of a relation outside of the church. The count may not press you further on, for that is the tone of his letter.'

'Yes, I can refuse to join him, father,' Heyla nodded, 'but I want so dearly to go to him! I know very well what awaits me, but I have to go. It has become impossible for me to lead a normal life. Knowing I could have been with my love and having to endure a life without that love would be misery. It was not my wish to bring dishonour on this house. I do also not wish you to leave our town. Destiny has decided for us. I long to see Louis of Male again. The longing burns in my heart. I want to hear what he has to say, what he thinks my future can be at his side.'

'So be it, daughter,' John de Smet sighed, 'but I will have to present your decision to our family, to your grandfather and grandmother, to your mother, and to the Vresele family. Your brother, Wouter, is too young to take part in any discussion.'

'Yes,' Heyla replied, 'so be it. I have your character, father. You will have to respect my will in this.'

'I know, girl. I shall. God bless us all.'

In the evening of the next day, the same squire who had brought the message arrived at the workshop of the goldsmith. Heyla threw a heavy cloak over her, drew her hood over her face, and accompanied the man to the *Gravensteen*. It was a bleak winter day, evening fell. The wind blew icy cold in the streets of Ghent.

Count Louis of Male, only sixteen years old since a few months, stood very nervously twitching his hands in a lavishly decorated room of the *Gravensteen*. He went to warm his body near the hearth fire. He was startled when Heyla was brought into the room. He quickly ran to her in a few paces and took her cold hands in his warm palms. The squire closed the door behind Heyla.

‘You have come, dear, dear Heyla! I am so glad! I thought you wouldn’t. You do feel for me, then, as I feel for you?’

Louis didn’t wait for an answer. He drew Heyla to him and Heyla settled a while against his breast.

‘You must think of me as a woman of little virtue,’ Heyla whispered, ‘yet I had to come here. It is said that women feel more deeply than men, but I do confess, lord, you see me in fear and in pain. I fear for what might happen to me. I am but a poor, common girl, not one of the noble ladies of the court, who no doubt flock around you. I remain in fear for my honour, small though the honour of a common *poorter* girl may be. And I am in pain for my father and for the rest of my family, who shall feel dishonoured by my coming. Still, yes, I was foolish and the slave of my feelings, but I have come. Tell me, lord, are you an honourable man? What do you seek from me?’

Louis drew Heyla on to two chairs covered with embroidered cushions. He made her sit, and he continued to stand in front of her, at a loss for what he might say. After long moments during which he merely admired Heyla’s face, he started, ‘I do am a fool too. You have kept your cloak on. Give that to me! Get warm at the fire!’

He took Heyla’s cloak, which she undid without standing up from the chair. He admired the finely coloured light blue dress she wore. The dress followed the lines of her body as well as silk would have done. She wore the lightest, best cloth of Ghent. He drew her chair even closer to the hearth. It was dark outside, yet no candles had yet been lighted in the room. Louis studied Heyla’s face in the orange, changing light of the flames. His thoughts and emotions raced. He tried to master his desires.

Only then did he reply, ‘I want very much to be honourable with you, Jonkver Heyla. Please call me only Louis. I do realise summoning a young girl to me like I did, a free *poorter* woman of Ghent instead of a noble lady of the court, may seem a dishonourable act, an act of force. I regret this. I am not unable of empathy. I know how you must feel, how your father must feel. I am bound to be married. I may have to marry the daughter of a king or the daughter of a duke. They are called Isabella and Margaret. I am utterly miserable having to mention their names to you. I would have liked to marry the woman I love, but it cannot be. I am not allowed to marry you. My feelings for you are sincere, though. From the first moment I saw you I felt we belonged together like a tree and its leaves. I love you, and would love you only in my life, for one sweeter and dearer to me cannot exist. In another world, a world without kings and dukes and counts, God should have destined us to meet and he would have allowed us to stay together forever. I am the wealthiest and the poorest man of Flanders, Heyla! I am the most powerful and richest lord of Flanders, but also the poorest because I have nothing to offer you. I love you, but I can bring you only shame, disgrace, and lack of honour. I should never have asked you to come to me, that would have been kinder, but I had to tell you at least once how much I loved you. Only the sight of you makes me happy. Nothing else in life makes me feel truly happy but you, and you console me with the world I have to live in. I see ugliness around me. You are the one beautiful, pure, honest, trusted jewel around me! Now you know. The loss of you would pain me to death. I have indeed nothing to offer to you. Why have you come?’

‘I felt your unhappiness, lord, though you were unhappy because of me I did not dare to hope. When we first met it was suddenly also very clear to me that we belonged together, though I knew that would not be possible. I also love you, if love is what I feel for you at this instance.’

‘What do you feel then, dear Heyla?’

‘I feel a great compassion, tenderness, and also the excitement of the passion to be close to you, be united with you, at whatever cost. That is my pain, Louis! I am so weak. I could so easily be hurt and lost.’

‘I shall never hurt you, Heyla! If you want, we can be together. We shall have to hide our passion, of course, but I will find ways. We cannot be together all of the time. I have a court around me. Believe me, though, if I could make the court disappear, I would not hesitate. What I cannot tear from my breast is the desire for you. Our fate is cruel, but we can try to accommodate the life I have to lead with the moments we can have together. I’ll honour you, my lady Heyla, rest assured of that. I shall protect you, load riches on you, provide for you, care for you.’

‘If you love me then, ... oh, so many ifs! I suppose I shall have to grab eagerly the few moments I can have of you. People say that God is love, but He does play a cruel fate on us!’

‘Maybe not,’ Louis pleaded now. ‘We can often be together, unknown to the rest of the world. I can bestow wealth on you and the protection of armed men so that you need not fear. I will have to talk to your father. I shall provide for you. I can take care of you, and I will. I can have you live in a house in Ghent, and provide you with a manor in the country. I can, however, never marry you. I dare not. Too many men, knights and dukes, the aldermen of the cities, would turn against us. They would hurt you, if only to reach me and force me. We would be crushed.’

‘So you would hold me as paramour, as a whore, as a slut, not better than the poor women who walk at nights along the quays and in the gutters of Ghent!’

‘That is not how I would address you, my love! I would see you as my only true love, and only true wife before God, though not before the people. It is the only way, or we must depart and live separately.’

‘Well then,’ Heyla de Smet abandoned. ‘Such then is my fate to be. If God is love, how could He condemn what we feel and how we shall live? You may embrace me.’

Louis smiled at the ease she spoke these last words. He went to her chair, placed his two hands around her. She offered her lips and he kissed her. They held the kiss long and sweetly. A little later, they both laughed. Heyla touched her lips with her hand.

‘I have ordered a light supper for us. Are you hungry?’

‘I am,’ Heyla exclaimed, smiling. ‘What has the lord of Flanders prepared for me?’

Louis put up a finger, asking Heyla for a little patience. He went to the door, called out to his squires, and demanded the meal to be brought in. Servant maids arrived with a few silver platters. The meat, pork and roasted chicken, was warm and tasty. When the servants had left, Heyla took the platters from the table, placed them on the thick tapestries in front of the hearth, and they ate like children on the floor.

Afterwards, they placed the platters back on the table, called in the servants to take the dishes away, and then Louis told not to be disturbed anymore. Heyla sat near the hearth, stretching out her long legs. Louis pushed more logs into the fire, and then he came to sit next to her, caressed her legs.

‘We will have to do something that is a sin, then,’ Heyla began. ‘You will marry. You will commit adultery with me and stain your eternal soul.’

‘And you with me,’ Louis agreed. ‘But we will be happy. And the sin will be one of love. How could I not be happy with you beside me?’

Heyla lay down entirely. Louis brought his face over her, kissed her passionately, let his weight be felt by her body, but he too, shortly after, lay down next to Heyla, his body touching hers. They held hands and didn't move for a long time.

'Have you made love before?' Heyla asked suddenly to Louis.

Louis was startled again. This girl dared ask such questions! He hadn't expected being asked this so soon.

'Yes, I have. A court lady of much experience, sent by my father to teach me. I only found that out much later. My mother would have been outraged. Making love is an entirely different thing from being in love. We will make love, I hope. I would like to make love to you, but we will not this evening. I think we need to know each other better. When we are comfortable and intimate with one another, we'll see what happens. You must want it to happen, without fear. Is that all right with you?'

'Yes, that would be fine. I also feared you only wanted to take me this evening, then, your passion consummated, discard me.'

'I wouldn't discard you, never. You should know how vulgar many of the court ladies talk about love. That is not what I aspire to. I despise them. They make love seem ugly to me. I long for beautiful things in life. I shall honour you.'

'Yes!'

Count Louis of Male remained on the tapestries still a long time, his hand in Heyla's hand. Finally, he stood, 'you have to go now, Heyla. Your father will not forgive me if I hold you any longer. The next time, we will spend the night together.'

Heyla stood too.

'My squire will escort you to your house. Will you come the next time when I can escape to Ghent?'

'I'll come back like a puppy to its master, each time you like, my lord,' Heyla jested.

'No, not like that. Come as a free woman. I'll think of something so that that we can be near more often.'

Louis of Male felt strangely at ease with himself, then. He was not anymore alone. He had Heyla to think about. The matters of state weighed less on him, now. They seemed from that evening on less important. He wanted to do the right thing in his county. For that, he would have to be strong, impose his will, but in such a way not too many people were offended.

Could he talk to Heyla about such matters? He needed to have her close to him!

They kissed goodbye, and Heyla sped from the castle, accompanied by Louis's squire.

John de Smet had not gone to bed that evening. He sat at the table in his workshop. He was not working. He had been praying.

When Heyla entered, he looked at her questioningly.

'I am still a virgin, father, which is the answer to the question that hangs on your lips. But I shall not remain a virgin for long. I am going to be the count's lover. That is my decision.

Louis will take care of me, of that I am sure.'

'Are you going to live in sin, then, girl?'

'I will live in the sin of love, father. God is love, He will forgive me. Such is my fate and my will. But I am happy, father! We are truly in love, can you imagine that? Having met Louis and heard him whisper his words of love to me, I would not want any other man anymore.'

John de Smet placed his head in his hands, 'sweet Jesus and Mary! You had better let me do the talking to your grandparents and your mother first, for all hell is going to break loose in this house! We shall have to tell the family! How damn stupid I was to have taken you to the *Gravensteen*! Your mother will never forgive me!'

Heyla laughed. John de Smet saw his girl so very happy. He too laughed at his table. He remained worried nevertheless.

\*\*\*\*\*

Count Louis of Male could not speak in that period to John de Smet, for it became known the next day already the count was in Ghent. A delegation of aldermen stood rapidly at the gate of the *Gravensteen*, asking for an audience with the count. Jan Willade, Jacob van Wackine and Simon van Aalst pressed to Louis of Male. They argued with him the entire morning, wanting the count to recognise Edward III as the rightful king of France. The aldermen urged him once more to marry Isabella. Louis refused categorically. By noon, he was tired of arguing and told he had to return surreptitiously to Male. The aldermen then took their leave, respectfully, but stern and angry. Count Louis rode back to his castle as fast as his horses could carry him.

During the rest of January of 1347, not only the aldermen of Ghent pestered Louis to marry Isabella of England. The aldermen of the other cities and envoys from the smaller towns came to speak to him, repeating the same message. Finally, even the cities worn out of arguments, the aldermen forced the count to accompany them to the small town of Menen, where a meeting would be planned with King Edward III himself. Louis of Male rode with three knights of his court, but twelve aldermen of the cities rode with him, followed by an escort of twenty men-at-arms of the towns' militia. These men soon proved to be his guards. They never left him alone. The aldermen treated Louis as if he were a child. At least three guards stood permanently at the door of his room in a house of Menen. Louis continued all through the month of February to refuse to marry Isabella, telling also he had already promised to marry Margaret of Brabant. This had been the dearest wish of his late father, Louis pretended. At the beginning of March, Menen was in uproar. Messengers had arrived, announcing he arrival of King Edward III. The king was on his way from Calais to meet young Louis of Male.

King Edward III rode into Menen early the next evening. He went immediately to the great hall in which, he had been told, Louis of Male and the aldermen of the Flemish cities would be waiting. Edward walked, still clad in armour. He pushed open the door of the hall brusquely, wanting to make an impression. He found the envoys of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper standing around the young count of Flanders. The men were still providing arguments, a hundred times over repeated, to the count.

Edward stepped to Louis, gauging the youth.

Louis of Male looked defiantly back at the great king. He saw a forceful middle-aged man, tall, imposing and arrogant, a fierce warrior dressed in shining armour, a long sword at his side. A squire followed the king, carrying the royal helmet, battle-axe, mace and the royal, steel gloves. The king's eyes flared hard, reproachful and unforgiving. This was a king who would have his way, Louis of Male sensed.

Edward looked around. Why had he, the king of England and of France, have to come to this place to convince a count, a young puppy still, to marry his daughter? Why did the boy not beg him, the king, respectfully, for the great honour of marrying into the king's family? The king saw a child in front of him, a youth with the clean, pale face of a boy. How had this boy been able to withstand the guards and aldermen of Flanders? Did the youth not understand what honour was done to him?

Edward strode to Louis, shouting, 'good evening, Count Louis, and good evening to you, honourable aldermen of the good cities of Flanders and lords all. What is happening here? Do

we have a young man who does not want to marry? Are you sure, lords, you told him dutifully the joys of a lustful marriage?’

The king drew nervous laughs from the other men present. He remarked a nervous twist on the lips of Louis of Male. The young count stood obviously spellbound by the power of the warrior who had erupted into the hall so suddenly and cocksure. There hung fear on the face of Louis of Male. The young man stepped back, came almost with his back to stand against the rear wall.

The youth managed to stammer, ‘I was at Crécy, your highness. I saw my father being killed by your archers!’

King Edward went even closer up to Louis. He towered above him, almost pushed the youth to the wall. He then addressed Louis in a whispering, hissing tone, so that the words could only be heard by the young count.

‘Have you, boy, have you? I heard a story your father was treacherously killed on the battlefield by his own side, stabbed in the back by the duke of Alençon. Well, we slew the duke too, so he won’t be able to confirm that story, won’t he? We fought a battle, boy, an honourable battle. My army, which I was leading back to Flanders, was ambushed and we saw our route closed by the French. I was trying to avoid a battle with troops twice the size of my own army, but Philip of Valois was confident he could destroy us. I defended myself at Crécy! I must teach you something, boy. In a battle, the two sides fight to the death, and both sides fight to win. We, English, upheld the chivalrous code of war at Crécy, but we fought with the weapons we had and with the cunning we mustered in our minds, and with the courage of desperation. We were hungry, we were soaked, cold and tired. We, the English, were better armed, better suited for the battle, and we were smarter than the French. That is how we won, not by treachery. Now, if you want me to ask for your pardon of the death of your father, then I can accommodate you. I ask for your pardon for having killed Louis de Nevers. We had to kill the knights of France to win. No man of any degree of character would stand in arms and let himself be killed for the pleasure of the adversary. I fought, and I killed. I could not do otherwise. I will nevertheless tell you once, and once only: I want your county as my ally. It cannot be otherwise. Our two lands are too much interlinked by interests. Your countrymen are very alike to us in mind-set, spirit, courage and in being industrious, resourceful and active in trade and work. They are all that so very more than the Frenchmen! To reassert our alliance, I offer you my eldest daughter in marriage. I could not do more, boy, to have you and the aldermen, here, at my side. Show you too can be smart. How long do you think you will be able to stay in that county of Flanders of yours without the support and the active collaboration of the main cities of Flanders, without the support of England? The great beast of France is going to pick you up and swallow you as a small, green toad, and eat you raw! Are you going to flee from your lands as your father did? Think about what you expect of life, boy, be the lord of Flanders or shrink from it in fear and hide in the crooked arms of France! Choose, and choose quickly!’

Louis of Male had shrunk under the words that were served like as many strokes of a dagger. He remained silent.

King Edward, smiling benevolently, turned to the nobles, to the aldermen.

He opened his arms wide and cried, ‘I have asked the pardon of the count of Flanders for my army having killed his father, Louis de Nevers, in battle. Louis de Nevers died a brave man, the casualty of an honourable battle. He died sword in hand, felled by our arrows. Now, can somebody show me my rooms? I am wet and tired!’

A man in the hall Count Louis didn’t know, advanced to the king, bowing several times. The man opened his arms and showed the way. The king strode out of the room. Many low voices

began to hum in the hall. The men talked, some excitedly. They all seemed to have forgotten about the count of Flanders, about young Louis. He left the hall, braving the general indifference, and stepped after King Edward. He too went to his rooms.

King Edward stayed only a few days at Menen. During these days, Edward spoke several times alone to Count Louis. Edward urged Louis to take in hands the leadership of the Flemish nobles and of the militia of the cities, and to lead a campaign against the usurper of the throne of France, Philip of Valois. The aldermen who heard of that conversation, supported the king. Edward wanted Louis to attack France from the north while he, Edward, would advance his armies from the south. The aim was to conquer Paris and the king's palace. Count Louis was weak, but he remained stubborn. He said he had to think about the proposals, he wanted to consult his advisors. He tried to win time. He told he had not yet found the occasion to gather fine counsellors at his court.

Young Count Louis understood very well he was a prisoner of the cities of Flanders. King Edward had arrived at Menen with a force of several hundred mounted men-at-arms as escort. Louis had no escort at Menen, but he had always around him the dozen aldermen and their more than twenty guards. He felt like a prisoner. He could not even go out of the castle, on hunting, for instance, without having the guards watching each of his movements. King Edward left soon. Louis of Male decided then his greatest priority for now was to escape out of the grip of the aldermen. He would have this one time, so close to the French border, to thwart the plans of the cities. He could not leave Menen without agreeing to the marriage with Isabella.

In the middle of March 1347, at Menen, Louis of Male dutifully accepted the terms forced upon him by the three cities of Flanders, the three members of the county. A charter was drawn up, stating that Louis would marry the Princess Isabella within two weeks after Easter of that year 1347. Louis feigned to agree with these arrangements, seeking a way to escape from his guards. The aldermen then travelled with him under guard to Saint-Winoksbergen, to Bergues. This small town lay closer to Calais than Menen. It was safer to meet Queen Philippa of Hainault, the English queen, and Princess Isabella there. Louis met Isabella, kissed her bravely, did not like her, but smiled magnificently. It seemed the princess was quite taken in by the handsome, wealthy count. In his heart, Louis remained horrified by the marriage, the more so since he and his father had already arranged his marriage to Margaret of Brabant. Louis called this promise now more and more to his mind, more so than the death of his father at the hands of the English archers.

Count Louis of Male feigned to be content with the fate the cities of Flanders had imposed on him. The aldermen and the other envoys were pleased with him. They told him he had done the right thing. Louis and the aldermen then organised a large banquet at Saint-Winoksbergen, to solemnly feast their reconciliation. They announced the marriage of Louis of Male with Isabella of England, and wanted to celebrate the renewed alliance with England.

Louis of Male had passed the previous days agreeably, talking to the aldermen and to the officers of the guard. He hunted in the woods of the countryside of Saint-Winoksbergen. He dutifully returned from his hunt to the town. On the twenty-eight of March of 1347, Louis rode once more on a hunt with his falconers, a heavy falcon on his gloved fist. He rode with his two squires and only a few guards. The guards of Flanders never left him, not even on the hunt, but most of the guards were busy at the organisation of the banquet of the evening. The guards were lulled into inattentiveness. Louis had docilely accepted everything the aldermen

demanded of him, so all was going to satisfaction for the aldermen of the cities and for the guards.

At the first pheasant Louis saw near the line of the wood, he threw his falcon in pursuit of the animal. Then, the young count shouted a cry of defiance and galloped after the falcon, his two squires following him closely. The falcon disappeared over the wood. Louis too disappeared among the trees, and then he vanished. The guards reacted too late and couldn't find him when they too surged into the forest. They had to return and face shame, for Count Louis of Male had fled, and he didn't return for the banquet!

Louis rode straight for Lille. There, he asked for the protection of the French garrison. Accompanied by French men-at-arms, he then rode south to Paris, where he was received with open arms by Philip of Valois. The French king laughed his head off. He was overjoyed to see the young count arrive at his court, having smartly fled from out of the greedy hands of the Flemish aldermen and the English lords, and so honour the homage Louis had sworn to him at Amiens. Philip of Valois was so happy that he did not force the young Louis into officially repeating the homage of Flanders done to him privately at Amiens after Crécy. A grander ceremony of homage could wait. King Philip of France agreed in Paris with Louis's marriage to Margaret of Brabant. Count Louis stayed a few days in the royal palace of Paris, then he rode to his mother's castle at Conflans, not far from France's capital.

\*\*\*\*\*

In April of 1347, new hostilities broke out on the borders of Flanders. French troops garrisoned at Saint-Omer raided the frontier regions. The Flemish cities dispatched troops to counter them, and this army pursued the French to the town of Arques, which they captured and destroyed. A large force of militiamen of Ghent invested Cassel then to guard the countryside. More troops were sent to the southernmost towns of Flanders. The Flemish militia were led previously by the *ruwaard* of Flanders, Zeger the Kortrijkzaan, but in 1347 Margrave William of Jülich was made *ruwaard*. William van Vaernewijc and John van Meesine of Ghent confirmed William in this role.

In May of the year 1347, Count Louis, staying with his mother at the castle of Conflans, ordered his counsellors to negotiate for his wedding with Margaret of Brabant, second daughter of Duke John III. He received large sums of money from Philip of Valois for handing over his rights to the town of Mechelen to Henry, heir of Brabant. Louis of Male could then marry Margaret of Brabant, and he received additional territories around Nieuwpoort, Deinze and Bergen from the French King.

On the second of July of 1347, with grand pomp, Count Louis of Male married Margaret of Brabant at Vilvoorde. He was only sixteen, only count of Flanders since a mere eleven months, and he had already allied the cities of Flanders and the king of England against his person. The bride was twenty-four, eight years his senior.

## Chapter 2. The Plague in Ghent. Spring 1348 – Autumn 1349

### Heyla de Smet

In August of 1347, Count Louis of Male rode from his castle at Male to Ghent with the intention to stay there for a few days, once more without being announced to the aldermen. He was in a good mood on a splendid, sunny day. The sky shone of a cerulean blue and Louis felt in a happy mood. His affairs, it seemed to him, were in reasonable order. He regretted having alienated a little the aldermen of the largest Flemish cities, as well as the king of England, but that lay in the past, and now he was married, as best as he might expect. He enjoyed the support of King Philip of Valois, the king of France, so that his territories in France were secured. His conscience had not been violated. How could he have married the daughter of the slaughterer of his father, how could he have sworn to an alliance with the English, the arrows of which had slain Louis de Nevers? Even the Flemish cities had to show some respect for his motives. He also could not have sworn to do homage to the king of England, for he had already done so to King Philip in very tragic circumstances. He had had no choice in solemnly promising fealty to Philip, for that had been the only way to formally receive his feudal fiefs.

Louis of Male recognised he had now two main tasks for the future. He had to reconcile one way or another with the cities of Flanders, and he had to make sure the king of England did not retaliate to the offense by once more stopping the export of wool to Flanders. On this last point he did not fear too much, for King Edward was still bound by charters to the Flemish main cities, who remained his allies. This was a contradiction he would have to live with for a certain time.

Nevertheless, this state was awkward, and Louis felt the issues had somehow to be solved. He differed from his father, in that his opinion leaned to an uncomfortable middle position between England and France, but he did not quite well know how he could reconcile the irreconcilable!

Louis returned to Ghent, not because he wanted to discuss these matters with the aldermen of the largest city of his county, but because he longed to hold his love, the goldsmith's girl Heyla de Smet in his arms, and finish to satisfaction of all also that subject that had remained open. He had to talk to the girl's father! Louis laughed wryly. How could the goldsmith agree to Louis taking the man's daughter as mistress, and that only shortly after his marriage to Margaret of Brabant? Louis admitted he might have to confront an impossible cause, but were not many of his issues today impossible causes? He had to logically conclude what he thought he was obliged to do. He sighed, but his good mood could not be destroyed, for he called the fair face of Heyla to his mind. God, how he loved that girl! He already did not consider Heyla a different person from him; Heyla was part of him! She was his other self, everything he considered fine, pure and loyal.

Count Louis of Male arrived in the *Gravensteen*. He immediately sent his squire to the goldsmith's shop in the *Veldstraat*. It was not John de Smet who saw the squire coming from by his window, but John's wife, Heyla's mother, Marie Vresele. John, Marie and Heyla had talked much in the last months about the obsession of the girl. Tears had appeared often in the eyes of Marie and of Heyla, whispers and shouts had been exchanged, until Heyla kept

stubborn to her amorous opinion of the count, an opinion of love and trust, and until Marie had more or less consoled herself with her daughter's unconditional intention to become the lover of the count of Flanders. Marie wept, asking why such dishonour should befall on her family, but she too knew no prettier woman than her daughter Heyla lived in Ghent. She also recognised Heyla was a mature woman for her age, an intelligent woman, who usually had strong opinions and knew very well what she wanted. Many young men from the best families of Ghent had strolled along the windows of the de Smet family, throwing long, expectant glances to the house of the de Smets, hoping to catch a flirting glimpse of the rare beauty, but Heyla had never even once looked up from her work to these boys.

Letters from the count had been brought regularly by messengers to the *Veldstraat*, so the last hope of the young count forgetting all about the existence of Heyla had dissipated. Heyla had sent letters back, no doubt passionate phrases of love and dedication. The same squire had taken those letters from her and brought them back to his master. Heyla knew Louis was married, and why. Louis would have to father a son so that the noble Dampierre lineage would live on in Flanders. How would she be able to share her man with another woman? When Marie Vresele thought of such an eventuality for her husband John, she shuddered. Marie would have scratched out the eyes of the other woman, and then have left John instantly! Would Heyla be so fiercesome?

When the squire arrived now once more in the goldsmith's workshop, Marie though he merely brought yet one more letter. This time, however, the squire told her solemnly he would come back in the evening for Heyla. Count Louis wanted Heyla de Smet to meet him in the *Gravensteen*. Marie Vresele was much more inclined to grasp a broom and sweep the squire out of her house, but she sternly told the man her daughter would indeed this evening accompany him to the *Gravensteen*. Inside, Marie boiled and raged. When she gave the message to her daughter, Heyla giggled, then blushed as scarlet as she might possibly be. She then danced round her mother in utter joy. Marie had to cry hot tears again.

In the afternoon, Heyla put on her best new dress, hid in a light cloak and hood, and waited patiently until the squire she knew well by now would come and fetch her. Later, she was brought to the same rooms in which she had first met Louis alone. Louis of Male sat nonchalantly with his knees over an arm of the chair, reading a book. When Heyla entered, he went immediately up to her, didn't want her to kneel or bow, and embraced her passionately, almost crushing Heyla to his breast, leaving no doubt he had thought much of the goldsmith's daughter and had no intention at all of forgetting about her. The count invited Heyla to sit next to him. Then he just stared at her. He had prepared a long speech, and began to say what he had carefully worded in his mind.

Louis confirmed his feelings for Heyla had not changed. He spoke the tender words he had rehearsed in his head while riding to Ghent. He told Heyla everything that had happened since their first meeting. He expressed his love ten times, so that Heyla had to laugh at his insistence. He also said he had found a solution for Heyla's independence. He could provide her with a manor in the countryside, so that they could meet more often and for longer periods without hiding and without having to endure the aldermen of Ghent. The aldermen should no longer be aware the count had come to their town for sentimental reasons. Louis had a choice of manors to present to Heyla. He wanted to talk these matters over with her in the evening and beg for her agreement. He said he did not want once more to have to wait so long before seeing her back. He needed to talk to Heyla's father, of course, convince the goldsmith of his true feelings. Louis proposed to meet John de Smet the next day.

Louis spoke much and rapidly, then stopped and asked anxiously, for Heyla had not yet said a word under his torrent of courteous phrases, ‘have you, Heyla, thought about us? Have your feelings changed?’

‘No, of course, not,’ Heyla replied. ‘I still love you as much as when we first met. I longed to be near you, and yes, it has been far too long! Must we be sitting on chairs next to each other?’

‘Next door is a bedroom,’ Louis whispered, ‘but are you ready for a bedroom?’

‘Of course I am, silly’ Heyla answered.

She laughed, ‘I can hardly wait! Where is that bedroom?’

Louis stood, went to the rear wall, opened a small door hidden in the wooden panelling on the walls, opened it and showed the temptation to Heyla.

Heyla laughed out loud, maybe a little too shrill, but she ran past Louis into the beckoning darkness. Louis caught her halfway between the door and the bed. He drew Heyla to him, embraced her furiously, let his hands glide in caresses over her breasts, her belly, to between her legs. Heyla tore herself loose, pushed her tunic over her shoulders, and then presented her back so that Louis could nervously untie the strings of her white shirt. This would have taken Heyla so much time to undo, and she did not want those seconds to be spent, now. Soon, Heyla stood naked in her stockings before Louis. Louis passed his eyes eagerly over her body, which he found even finer than her face, struggled impatiently out of his clothes too. Heyla giggled again when she saw Louis standing there, nude, helpless and shy. She jumped on the bed, spread-eagled, exposing more of her alabaster skin to Louis in lascivious curves. Louis came to lie upon her, covering with his hands the gentle swelling of her breasts. Their flesh touched. She felt Louis desired her, so she drew him even closer to her. She then brought her legs so high that Louis could also draw her stockings away in one long caress after the other, and then he slid into her. Their first son was conceived that very evening in Ghent.

Afterwards, they lay both next to each other under the sheets of the bed, spent, happy, and passions satisfied. Heyla lay in Louis’s arms, her head on his chest. He ran a finger over the dimple in her upper lip, over her cream-coloured pale cheeks flushed with a little red where the rougher skin had chafed her.

‘It seems to me,’ Louis began after a long time, ‘all has worked out so easily between us. It almost seems a miracle, how we met and fell in love. Do you believe in inexorable fate drawing people together, in being predestined for each other? I can scarcely believe it. How many people experience such love? Is it common or rare? I seem to have always known you, as if we were absolutely destined to meet, to become instantly aware we belonged together. You are the only person on earth I feel at ease with and want to be at ease with. I have confidence in no one else. I pray we never quarrel and fall out. Why should we? I would like to keep you at my side always, but that cannot be. Is life always like this, does God give great happiness and great sadness with the same hand? I can better protect you by holding you at a distance from the court, though a few of my knights know my passion for you.’

‘Here I am,’ Heyla replied, opening her arms. ‘I should not be here, I should not commit adultery, but I am perfectly happy as your lover. It cannot be otherwise. I would like to strangle that Margaret of yours, naturally, but as long as you don’t really love another woman, and continue to swear that, I’ll be fine. I may cry my eyes red at times, but I’ll take whatever happiness fate can give me. Now, tell me, what are you going to do the next months?’

‘The first I have to do,’ Louis mused, ‘is to find ways to reconcile the cities of Flanders and the king of England with me. That will be hard, for I have insulted them by fleeing from Saint-Winoksbergen. I desperately need to find me advisors, other than the knights of my court. I need competent advisors for the matters at hand. I must confront opinions. The

knights serve their interests, of course, the interests of the nobility, the interests of the lords of the castellanies and of the manorial domains, the interests of the countryside. I must bind poorters from the cities to me, merchants, deans of the guilds, influential men from the towns, preferably no knights who are also poorters. The parliament of Flanders is a council of such men, but how am I to know who is wise and honest and intelligent among those men? You see, Heyla, my father succeeded only in sowing discord between him and the cities. He sought domination in confrontation. It seems to me much more power hides in being appreciated, in being loved and admired. I must break through the conflict between the counts and the cities. Our mutual powers are pretty well defined by charters, so that should be a fine basis for mutual understanding. My knights tell me I am naïve. I have to use the sword, they tell me, but they told that to my father all his life, and he didn't succeed too well in submitting Flanders. I don't want to submit Flanders to me. I want the county to like me and follow me because of what I tell makes sense. Our interests should not collide but walk hand in hand. The issue is, I am still very young, and I believe I own little of that strange talent of imposing by my figure and speech, as some of my knights do. How can I make people listen to me without them staring at me and see a stupid, greedy, spoilt, arrogant boy of a generation of arrogant counts? I know what they think!

'Of course, Louis dear,' Heyla joked. 'You are a spoilt boy and you act like one. The knights see only the boy, but that will change with time. You are handsome, tall, nice-looking, strong, attractive, and you wear your head proudly, with dash. All the girls who meet with you must fall for your boyish, ephebe body. I should have made it much more difficult for you to seduce me!'

'No, no, no,' Louis exclaimed. 'Oh no, you seduced me quite sufficiently, young girl! Who could resist these wonderful green eyes of yours, that small, pert nose, your soft, silken, blond, long hair, your sensual lips and that stern, Ghentish look of you. How am I going to live without you?'

Heyla slapped Louis on the cheek, 'you are not, definitely not, going to live without me. I accept to see you not all the time, I accept sharing you with your duchess as long as you don't love her, but I expect you to come to me and kiss me and take me to bed as often as you can!'

'Have I hurt you?'

'A little, yes. It was a sweet hurt. I suppose we are going to have a child now.'

'What? From the first time?'

'From the first time, yes, and from the multiple efforts of your lordship tonight. Would you like to have a child?'

'It would be the dearest of my wishes come true to have a child by you. I have to provide for you. I must talk to your father. I want to do the right thing with you, matters being what they are. When could I do that?'

Louis of Male looked earnestly at Heyla.

Heyla studied her fingers.

'I am going to help you with something that worries you. Just suppose I knew a group of very influential and wise men in Ghent, merchants and craftsmen, people like my father, men you could listen to and learn about the situation of Ghent and of Flanders. Would you be interested in meeting these men and discuss matters of the town and of the county with them?'

Louis of Male pushed himself up on his arms. He was instantly alerted.

'What is that, Heyla? Have you been sent to me to share my bed in order for these men to reach me?'

Heyla reacted quickly, 'no, of course not! They do not even know I proposed for you to meet them. It was just an idea that passed in my head when you mentioned you needed advisors. When I tell them, by the way, they may still refuse. They don't like the counts of Flanders too

much. They are not too happy to meet with people of the court. They are keen on their independence. You seemed desperate for finding such men. Those I could present to you would be among the most discreet and yet the wealthiest men of Ghent. I should think they are also among the wisest of counsellors and the most honest and modest people of Ghent, my father one of them. I want to help you, not to ambush you.'

'Well then, why not? I am curious who you might come up with. I had thought of asking one or two aldermen of Ghent, but who can I trust? This is a test, Heyla. Think well before you answer, for if these men you know are not completely trustworthy, worthy of my confidence, and utterly honest, I may have to look at you in a different way from before, a much less innocent way. Are you sure the men you know want the best for Ghent and for Flanders? I do not want men who play games and who build intrigues around me. If you are certain of what you mean, when can I meet them?'

'They all live in Ghent but for one. How about the day after tomorrow, early afternoon? Where? They'll come to you. Name a place.'

'No, not in the afternoon. In the evening, when darkness falls. Not in my *Gravensteen*. I shall come to them, on foot, in secret. This gets complicated. Here is what we'll do. My squire will come to your house late in the afternoon. You or somebody else come back with him to the *Gravensteen*, then you or that someone else take me to where you want. I trust you. I hope you don't draw me into danger, Heyla!'

'I wouldn't, Louis. I would not hurt the father of my child-to-be-born! Don't expect too much, though. Your squire may return with no one. The men care for their discretion, and they may refuse to come into the open and expose themselves, even for you.'

'Who are those men? Who can be so powerful as to refuse seeing the count of Flanders? Why the secrecy?'

'There is no secrecy. This is only a matter of being discreet, Louis, and of wanting – or not – of being involved with the most important man of the county. They are members of five families and they worship their discretion. They also love me. When they feel it necessary to kill for me, they would not hesitate.'

Louis pushed Heyla a little aside. He bowed over her.

'Should I understand you are involved in any plot? Should I believe it is dangerous for me to be involved with you?'

Heyla replied seriously, 'yes and no. If your intention is to hurt me, you should be afraid. You would make enemies. If your love means you have honourable intentions for me, they will cherish you and protect you by the means they have at their disposal.'

'Which means?'

'They have great fortunes.'

'I am very curious, now, dear Heyla, to meet your protectors. In the meantime, let's work some more on that child, lovely, dangerous Heyla-the-beauty!'

Heyla giggled, opened her arms and drew Louis to her.

Afterwards, the count's squire accompanied Heyla de Smet to her house in the *Veldstraat*, but only late the next morning.

\*\*\*\*\*

Two days later, the count's squire entered John de Smet's workshop near the evening. John knew why the man came to him. He went himself with the squire to the *Gravensteen* and then, with Count Louis of Male dressed in plain clothes, a hood drawn over his head, they stepped merely to the other side of the Saint Veerle Square. John de Smet led the count and the squire to the workshop of his father, to a blacksmith's forge. Louis of Male was very much surprised for having only a few steps to walk to arrive in the house of what he thought still was a

conspirational assembly of poorters of Ghent in some way connected to Heyla. He was not too sure about entering the forge, but John de Smet led the men through the workshop without looking over his shoulder, pushed open a door, and then Louis of Male was ushered into a large, finely decorated room, the old hall of Wouter de Smet, in which stood a long table and chairs. Around the table sat about a dozen men, the men he was to meet. John de Smet bade the count to sit at the end of the table. The men stood from their chairs and welcomed the count. Louis had the impression the poorters did not want to do him evil, so he relaxed. He also relaxed when he saw two women and Heyla at the other end. Heyla smiled encouragingly.

John de Smet introduced the men who were present.

‘Lord count, welcome! I have the honour of presenting you my friends. You are in the first house of my father, Wouter de Smet, who was a blacksmith once, long ago, and who is still a blacksmith in fact, but he is also a goldsmith now and a money-changer. My father owns other money-changing shops in Ghent, in Bruges and in Calais. We are also brokers and participate in business ventures with the other men you see here.

On the other side of you sits the monk Gerolf Vresele, a monk of the Franciscans of Ghent. He sees to it we remain pious men, men who do not sin. Next to him sits his brother, Gillis Vresele. Gillis is a trader, a merchant in victuals, but he actually trades in whatever he can buy and sell. He works with his son Boudin, a trader equally, who manages his ready money and his invested funds. Then you have the adopted son of Gillis Vresele, Ser Jehan Terhagen, who manages the lands owned by the Vresele family. Jehan does not live in Ghent. He lives in the countryside, near Axel, on his domain equally called Terhagen. He is building a castle there.’

Count Louis was startled, looked at me, Jehan Terhagen with renewed interest, then smiled at Heyla.

Wouter de Smet took over from his son, ‘a little farther from you sits Raes van Lake the Elder, a trader in cloth, with his sons Raes the Younger and William. They too are involved in business ventures with the other men of the table. They are or were weavers, for they now give orders to other weavers to work for them. Then, they have the cloth fulled to their extreme quality standards, and they trade with Bruges, Brabant, France, England, Germany, and Italy. They trade not only in cloth, but in almost anything you might think of, often together with the Vresele family.

The two other men who sit on the other side are John and Pieter Denout, fullers. They work much with the weavers of the van Lake family. They own several fulling mills in Ghent and they too trade in many materials, such as in fullers’ clay, wood, dyes, and so on.

Finally, at this end of the table sit Arnout de Hert and his son John. They are shippers, but they also transport over land. They transport our goods to where we need. They own a vast fleet of river-boats, as well as several sea-going cogs.

It is not typical at all for us to meet with women present, but this evening we have three women with us, as you can see. You know my grand-daughter Heyla. To her right sits Beatrise van Vaernewijc, who is married to the shipper John de Hert. You must have heard of the noblest family of Ghent, the van Vaernewijcs, who are more often than not aldermen of the city. To Heyla’s left sits Mechtild van Lens, a daughter also of one of the most noble poorter families of Ghent. She is married to Raes van Lake the Younger.’

Wouter de Smet sat and invited Gillis Vresele to speak. Gillis stood.

‘Lord count, we are a group of families that are closely bound by relations of friendship and of marriage. Heyla’s mother, for instance, is a Vresele. We call ourselves the Pharaïldis

group, and we had a hard discussion before we showed us openly to you because we are peaceful men who cherish their anonymity. We have agreed to meet with you because Heyla de Smet, who we all love, has asked us to help you with advice, and she told we could trust you. We do not usually trust counts, dukes, kings or knights, but we hold Heyla dear, and she guaranteed you wanted the best for your county. You are in need of counselling. She seems convinced you have the finest, honest intentions for Flanders and for the Flemish cities, so we decided we could and should meet with you.'

The count interrupted at that point.

'I am, of course, astonished, to meet with you, good poorters of Ghent. Heyla has been right about what she told you. I shall be honest with you and have confidence in you, as Heyla promised I could. I am the count, though! I noticed you placed your fate partially in my hands. You showed your face to me, open and without fear. I will do the same, but I must ask for your discretion also about what I, the count, am going to tell you. My words must not, in any circumstance, pass these walls. Do you swear to me that what I say does not leave this door? Only then can I trust you.'

'We do swear,' the Pharaïldis men nodded.

The count was satisfied. He was by nature a man who confided in nobody, but this evening he felt he could speak openly. He had to force himself to talk about his most grave issues. He hesitated, then said, 'let me explain to you what I would like to accomplish in Flanders. I aim for a wealthy Flanders, wealthy from industry and trade and agriculture. I aim for a peaceful Flanders, a county at peace, not wrecked by battles and wars in its territory, but also a county that can defend itself and if necessary fight for its interests and the integrity of its frontiers. I seek a Flanders, first and foremost, that is at peace with its count, which it seems is by far the hardest of all aims to realise. I want a Flanders in which its count is not a plaything of the knights, or a plaything of the power of the cities. I seek mutual respect and good understanding. There must be peace and satisfactory agreement between the nobility, the clergy, the poorters, the farmers and the commoners! This must not be a peace obtained by the sword, obtained by oppression, but by mutual respect. We must all work together for the welfare of our county and we cannot do that if we fight each other constantly. I would like to be able to ride into any town of Flanders unannounced, and not be greeted by growls, shouts and stones thrown to my horses! I would like the army of militiamen of Flanders to protect the county, towns and castellanies alike, an army also constituted of the knights and of the militia together, an army as has fought so gloriously in the battle of the Golden Spurs, a long time ago. I also would like to nurture fine relations with the kings and the emperor, with Edward III and with Philip VI.'

Count Louis stopped for a few moments, looked at the faces around the table, and then he spoke on.

'I have started very badly in working towards these goals! I regret that very much, but I knew not better! I had to contradict the aldermen of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper in refusing to do homage to England and in refusing the marriage with Isabella of England. The smaller towns of Flanders ask me each day to call a halt to the privileges of the larger cities for the production of quality cloth, but however much I would like to grant them the right, I have not dared to move because I fear the wrath of the main cities, which can throw their militia against my feeble forces. I detected much conflict, hard feelings, hatred even, unrest and resentment between the smaller towns and the three main cities. These are all issues of politics, I know. I made a bad start, and I wondered how I could take more positive actions, but my mind seems frozen for the moment. I know not where to start first. I also have much to

learn about our industry, about our trade, about our ways of transport. I am now very open to you. I sit here as your count, and I feel the most powerless man on earth, yet it seems to me so many things must change in Flanders.’

Louis of Male paused a few moments, then he started anew to speak as if he addressed himself.

‘I must learn about the economics of my lands. I am afraid neither my father nor my mother provided me with teachers who knew about those subjects. I can read the Latin and Greek writers, I learned passages of those texts by heart, but I know next to nothing about real life, about the prices of common goods. Where are the markets where Flemish products are sold? Which products bring the greatest return? Which products show promise for the future? I surmise there is much flux and reflux in trade, prices go up and down, what is fine to sell or buy today is not worth while anymore tomorrow, but I don’t know anything about all that. I have remarked we have good weather most of the time and very bad weather at other times. Which crop should our farmers sow to avoid famine in those different weather conditions? I have to confess I am a complete fool compared to you, and hence my power in Flanders is almost non-existent. I have so much to learn to guide my people, and I must learn very quickly. But who can teach me? Who can counsel me in such matters? No knights! When I must say yes or no to a question my courtiers ask me, I must know why I should answer with yes or no, not just chose anything. It should be me asking the right questions to my courtiers, and to turn away from them, address other advisors when I get no satisfactory answers. So, as I remarked to Heyla, I want men of Flanders around me who are wise and knowledgeable about such matters of state. I hope they can tell me which questions should be asked, and who can answer the questions, and how. Having said all that, I am not totally stupid. I learned how a royal court works, how political intrigues can be known and be acted upon. I have the sensibility to detect a person’s intentions. I am not a bad orator. I know how to play out power and arguments. I have learned how the laws of the lands work. But what is all this, without the intricate comprehension of the interests of the county?’

Louis of Male had spoken with much passion, ever faster, with ever more zeal. He stopped speaking, then, and looked around the table. He had thought to see men who did not really understand what he wanted, for his knights had looked at him that way when he had told them something similar. The Pharaïldis men were merely smiling and nodding. They were obviously pleased with what they heard.

Wouter de Smet said, ‘well, lord, we have indeed much to talk about. We can help you on most of the subjects you mentioned. You have here traders, weavers, fullers, goldsmiths and money-changers, and shippers at the table. We know about trade and about many crafts. We know where to trade and in what, seek short-term profits and long-term profits. However, we should not talk on an empty stomach! Talk on an empty stomach and with a dry throat is not the Ghent way of discussing serious matters! I am going to call in our wives and daughters now. They shall serve us. You must be aware, lord count, our women know as much about these things as we, and they are as discreet as we are. Maybe this is quite unusual, but we use the brains of our wives and daughters too! We cannot afford to discard good judgement and instinct!’

Wouter opened another door, the door to the kitchen, and the army of smiling Pharaïldis women entered a short time later with silver platters and cutlery and cups and jugs of wine and beer.

Louis of Male smiled too, then. Yes, he was in Ghent after all!

The dishes were displayed on the table cloth. Louis of Male could not but remark how splendidly the silver and the glass glittered in the light of the candles.

Raes van Lake the Elder was the first to stand, take a cup of wine and hold it high. He shouted, ‘hail and prosperity to our count! May he be and remain as wise as he speaks. God preserve our count!’

The men cried in unison, ‘health!’ and drank. Louis of Male did the same. The wine was among the best he had tasted in France and in Flanders.

‘Lord count,’ Raes van Lake the Elder continued, ‘some of the issues you stated are easily solved. When I say solved, I mean mostly that your actions can rather simply be defined. It does not mean you can give them all and immediate satisfactory solution. Life is like that usually, one makes the best of it, as it comes. We, The Pharaïldis men, swear by logic. We seek the best solution at a particular moment, and when that solution turns out badly, we adjust with new decisions. We may propose solutions that do not satisfy everyone in Flanders, but when a cause is felt right, then at least our conscience is clear because we came to the best judgement possible of the situation. How everything turns out lies in God’s hands. We do not fear to act. Let me explain, now, being confident that what I am going to say is also the viewpoint of all the men and women around this table. We have already discussed these subjects in the past. Our opinions are firm, which I believe is what you need. One should not hesitate in one’s decisions, show no doubt, but redirect when necessary.’

Raes paused. He drank.

‘In the conflict between the kings, we feel Flanders should keep strict neutrality. Flanders needs the wool from England and the grain from France. We think you did very well to refuse to swear loyalty to King Edward. You did also well not to marry Isabella. Your father died at Crécy, in a battle against King Edward. We would have thought less noble of you had you, so soon after your father’s death, chosen the cause of Edward, however much sympathy we have for the English king. Flanders’ wealth depends largely on the wool of England, however, so you should not alienate England too much either. We judge you should again and again clarify your views to King Edward. Ambassadors can do that. We believe Edward to be a reasonable man, a man who understands logic and what is seemingly right. He will admit in the end you cannot quarrel with Philip of Valois, for the reality is that Philip has indeed obtained the crown of France from his peers and from the Pope, and Edward has not proven powerful enough to conquer much of royal France. If you join into an open alliance with England, your lands in France will be forfeited, which means practically all your lands. France might then yet again invade Flanders with a strong army of knights, which would help nobody, also not King Edward. Edward lacks the means to conquer France and to come to the assistance of Flanders. That should be clear by now, and could be told to King Edward, even though the message might depress him. Edward may win battles, launch *chevauchées* through France, but we doubt he can win the war. So, you did very well! You did homage in private to Philip of Valois, which was the natural thing to do. Otherwise, you would not have obtained Flanders in feudal fief.

Nevertheless, should Philip of Valois ever demand of you to swear formal homage to him, you might refuse. After all, your forefathers, and also our forefathers, fought with William of Jülich against France to guarantee the survival of the independent county of Flanders. The king of France still holds your ancestral castellanies of Lille, Douai and Orchies. You might argue you would only be able to swear open loyalty to the king of France after these territories have been returned to you. These lands were so dear to your family.

For the rest, well, it is only by diplomacy with the kings of England and France that a lasting solution can be negotiated. Although you are the count of many lands, the place where you can ultimately be safe from either power, because you would be as powerful as they, is in Flanders. Flanders is where your place is, and where you should set up permanent residence.

You might argue to Philip of Valois that also Margaret of Brabant would prefer to stay closer to her family.

As to the conflict of the count of Flanders with the cities, we believe Bruges, Ghent and Ieper will now need some time to digest your marriage with Brabant and your open refusal of an alliance with England. You must succeed in winning renewed, cordial relations with King Edward. You might even allow the cities to lend him some help in his war with France until all your power is consolidated.

How can we help you? First, we can explain you all about the economies of Flanders. Then, we shall explain what we just told you, in Ghent, to many influential people, to knights also, and let our opinion be known widely that you acted wisely.'

'Has that been true?' Louis wondered, astonished. 'Everybody tells me I did very badly by refusing King Edward, especially the aldermen of the cities told me so!'

The Pharaïldis men smiled and nodded encouragingly.

'Yes! What I told you is how we esteem the situation, how we sincerely feel. You acted honourably. To continue, we feel the cities, not immediately, not in the first months, but gradually, will forgive and forget. You did not do as they demanded, but what they demanded was an outrage to your honour. You may have gained some form of respect from the aldermen by staying to your views, for you showed you were a man of your word, a man of honour, and traders appreciate such an attitude. You showed you were truly the count and not a puppet in their hands. They may reconsider in the coming months. Other men will have been elected as aldermen and deans, elections in which you can have your say. We shall tell the new aldermen it is wise to come to an understanding with a wise, honourable man, and to adhere to his views, which are neither against France nor against England, but surely for Flanders!'

Louis of Male blushed with sheer pleasure. He smiled at Heyla de Smet.

'With the balm of healing time, within a year or so,' Raes continued, 'the cities should well notice and have to acknowledge that England did not stop its export of wool although you refused to swear allegiance to Edward. Edward is in need of money again! The siege of Calais was a triumph, but has depleted his funds once more. We know of his financial state. Edward needs desperately the income from the sale of wool, and he needs the taxes on wool. His merchants may revolt when he blocks the export to Flanders. When the Flemish cities begin to understand your viewpoint was reasonable, a viewpoint we will stress and support in our conversations with other traders and craftsmen in Bruges and Ieper, then the aldermen will have to admit your wisdom was great and your ideas shall be listened to. The aldermen will realise you are worth while listening to, instead of them rejecting your opinions outright. The aldermen will say, "how young this count is, and yet so wise, so excellently sensing what should be done to augment our wealth and to preserve our peace!"'

The really, outstandingly difficult issue is the one about the cloth making privileges of the smaller cities. You seem to be of the opinion it would be in the interest of all to let the cloth-making industry spread in Flanders. We, Pharaïldis men, have often discussed this issue. Ghent is already producing so much quality cloth, that prices have fallen. High quality cloth is not a rare product anymore. Brabant produces cloth now that is practically as fine as ours. Quality cloth will soon be the standard for all cloth. No cloth will be sold but quality cloth. The secrets of producing this kind of cloth are known in almost every town of Flanders and Brabant. So, we join your opinion that allowing the smaller towns to weave any kind of cloth, also high quality cloth, is the natural evolution we cannot stop or hinder anymore. Oppression by the three main cities of Flanders has gone too far. It has created too much conflict, hatred and discord in Flanders. We should not anymore force the other towns in our quarters into abject submission.

We, Pharaïldis men, shall also, slowly, judiciously, spread this message. It will take time for the cities to accept this point of view and some, mainly the guild of the weavers, will never accept this opinion. Still, the industry of weaving is changing, too. The craft of weaving has been conglomerating since some time, now, mainly in Ghent. There are still many weavers around, but the number of men who provide orders for weaving has been diminishing, for fewer and fewer weavers have the means to seek new markets and the funds to transport cloth far and wide. Fewer families know how to reach the markets. Fewer families trade in cloth, but when they continued to do so, they trade in such enormous quantities that the smaller weavers cannot follow the lower prices. The traditional smaller weaver shops are going out of business, despite existing regulations which protect the smaller weavers. This change we believe will accelerate in the future. Once a smaller number of prominent weaver-traders, *lakensniders*, remain in the city, these men will want to buy cloth from everywhere, at the highest quality and the best price, from about anywhere in Flanders, out of the smaller towns too, and from out of the villages. This would be a force that could deliver us even higher quality cloth, in larger quantities. Of course, many weavers will leave Ghent. Why not? Should we stop this evolution, even if we could, which we doubt? We think not! Ghent has become too large for us, too much a town of one industry alone. Living from one product alone is dangerous for the ultimate survival of the city. Ghent has also become unhealthy. It would not be so bad if Ghent stopped growing for a while. It would not be so bad for weavers to live better in the countryside!

Count Louis of Male listened eagerly with open mouth.

‘That being said and confirmed,’ Raes continued, ‘we believe the cities of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper will fight the opening of the cloth-making in the smaller towns. The weavers still dominate these towns. You should be careful, therefore, for the aldermen dominated by the weavers still wield the power of the militia! You might begin by allowing some towns in the *Brugse Vrije*, in the castellany of Bruges, to produce higher quality cloth. Bruges is a city of traders, less a city of weavers. Bruges is a place where funds are assembled and exchanged. Bruges shall hence suffer less from opening the industry of weaving. The merchants of Bruges do not find all the cloth they would wish to sell from within their city alone. They might be eager to get the cloth from out of their neighbourhood instead of having to fetch it farther off. Bruges will grow richer from selling more cloth to more clients. When this evolution becomes clear everywhere in Flanders, the larger traders of Ghent will campaign for the opening of the trade, also in the quarter of Ghent. But we shall have to carefully monitor how the evolution of prices, sales, trade, and quality fares!’

‘So, I was instinctively right all the time,’ exclaimed Louis, very proudly.

‘You were,’ laughed the Pharaïldis men, so that Louis could laugh with them. ‘Instinctively doing the just and right thing is a great gift. But never forget that all instinctive reactions should be supported by logic and tested by reality!’

A heated discussion followed, during which the men shouted arguments to each other. They gestured wildly to support their words, proposed new ideas, cited figures, explained to Louis where the markets boomed, how much they won on cloth and grain and wine, on wood and iron, on lending out money for new business ventures.

After a while, Heyla de Smet left the place where she sat among the women, and she came to sit very near Count Louis. Louis placed an arm around her waist, looked at her lovingly, and that spontaneous gesture forced surprised looks in the eyes of the Pharaïldis men who had not yet grasped what exactly was going on between Heyla de Smet and Louis of Male. The Pharaïldis men withheld from formulating remarks, then. Heyla and Louis seemed not to

notice the change of mood in the Pharaïldis men. Their belonging together lay already quite natural on them.

The conversation turned into a friendly banter. As usual with the meetings of the five families, it became late in the night, time for the Pharaïldis men and women to return home.

Count Louis said, ‘honourable men of the Pharaïldis, friends, I think we must call a stop to our meeting. I would like us to hold similar discussions on a regular basis, though I cannot fix an agenda. I have a proposal. The next time I would like to see you, needing you advice, I could send a squire to master John de Smet with a letter written by my hand. The squire will come back two days later to Master John, to discuss a date, a date you can all agree on. On that agreed date, we meet. The next time, we can come together wherever you want. We should not hide anymore, but also not publicly boast about our discussions. Let’s say we discuss family matters among friends and partners. When you might feel it necessary to see me urgently, please send a messenger to me. I will give you each a letter, allowing you at all times to have access to me. My guards will bring you to me immediately, you or your messenger. Does that suit you?’

The Pharaïldis men nodded.

‘Something keeps turning around in my mind, a remark,’ Louis of Male concluded, scratching his hair. ‘My father told me many times about the man called James van Artevelde, the wise man of Ghent, a man he rather called the devil incarnate, his fiercest enemy. I have caught myself into having to admit that, except for the dominance of the large cities in Flanders and the outright support of the cities for King Edward, what I thought was the best way of positioning Flanders and the cities, was exactly the same policy as the one James van Artevelde proposed. What we discussed and concluded this evening, seems to me nothing more nor less than the continuance of the views of James van Artevelde. Isn’t that remarkable?’

The Pharaïldis men kept their silence suddenly and totally. They were embarrassed. Their smiles vanished, to give way to stern looks of the one to the other. They bowed their eyes to the table, and fidgeted with their fingers. Louis of Male thought they did not like being reminded of James van Artevelde.

Gillis Vresele replied to the remark of the count. ‘You are right again, lord count. You see five families around our table. Originally, the sixth family to meet with us, was represented only by James van Artevelde. James’s first wife was a sister of mine. He was our friend, but we fell out with him in his last years. We did not meet with James all the time, for he ventured into directions we did not always agree with. Once James obtained power over the cities and over Flanders, the power forced its own directions on James. Power corrupts the mind, takes over from the man, however strong the mind, and uses its own impetus to push the man who wields the power on. The power takes possession of the man and directs him. There is a lesson here for every leader. Nevertheless, James was a man who mastered power, as best as he could, and he did a very rare thing: he resigned from power at the end of his life. He should not have died so young, even though we did no longer agree with some of his judgements. James was pushed forward by forces he did not control anymore, even though he tried to resist. We regret the death of a friend. We did not always agree with the actions of your father. You may resent us for being so honest with you, but we promise you we shall always give you our views, our honest opinions, even when we do not any longer agree with you. We form no danger for you, we do not wield power. We do not fear power, but we do not want power to dominate us. Much of our reticence to publicity, much of our discreetness, comes from our remaining ever suspicious of political power. We do not seek political power. Likewise, we seek wealth, but we do not want wealth to dominate us. That is also why Gerolf

Vresele, our monk and spiritual, religious leader, is in our midst. He is our communal conscience and he holds us on the right path, the path of the righteous. As long as we feel we can trust you, we will give you our opinion fully and honestly. When we shall feel you have moved too far from us and from our opinions, we shall honestly and freely tell you we stop advising you.'

Count Louis of Male considered these words for a few moments. His anger rose, then subsided.

He added, 'right! Well, I could not ask more from you, I suppose. I need honest opinions. We may diverge in assessments in the future. We must promise to be honest to each other. I would like to constitute my council with not only knights of the county, but also with merchants and craftsmen, with men of prominence. Could you designate two men to sit with me in larger council? This council will not be parliament, it will be a real count's council, an inner circle, probably to meet at Bruges or at Male.'

Louis paused, then said, 'to conclude the evening, I would still like to have a short talk with John and Heyla de Smet and also, please, at the same time with Ser Terhagen!'

I was very much astonished to hear the count wanted me to meet together with John and Heyla. I had no idea why that should be. I stayed on.

Family by family, men and women, the Pharaïldis group left Wouter de Smet's forge. The men held a small lamp shaded against the draft in the streets of Ghent.

Gillis Vresele and Raes van Lake the Elder went home together. Behind them stepped their family.

Raes the Elder said to Gillis, 'remarkable, isn't it, how fate directs us? We vowed ten times not to become anymore involved with the politics of the great lords of our times, yet there we were, conspiring at the same table with the count of Flanders, the most powerful and the most hated of the adversaries of the cities!'

'Indeed,' Gillis grinned, 'but this young count, is an altogether very different man than his father. I had the impression he was honest, and not a devious man. Much should be ascribed to his youth, of course. His mind is filled with the best of intentions, but he has still a young mind, and power has not yet really come to him. I would say he has been rather isolated from his father, maybe educated and formed in character by his mother, maybe by his teachers. He has already developed a mind of his own, though. He is French educated, but he seems genuinely to feel for his county. He seems to have conquered Heyla too, and we all know she has the stubbornness of will of her mother Marie and the intelligence of her father. I put much faith in the instinct of women, though women are also prone to some lack of reason when they are in love, which is a great luck too, I would say! I wonder how that relation will fare! Heyla is the means by which we can convey our views to the count, but we shall have to be very careful. She knows how to cajole him, of course. What will happen the first time we disagree with this count, once he will be truly adult and have learned to master the power that can only grow for him? I was impressed with Louis of Male, young though he is. He seems to nurture noble intentions for his county. He has fine ideas for a boy so young, positive ideas, non-conflictual ideas. He seems to seek harmony and to comprehend the dangers of discord. He was not arrogant and not preening when he talked with us, not irascible, he listened to reason. He seemed an intelligent, high strung person to me. I did not detect the inbred arrogance of centuries we knew his father was capable of! Have you remarked also how he grew gradually more at ease with us along the evening? His trust grew. It will not take him more than a year or so before he knows all we know, and then he will act as he likes. He will not need our advice any longer. I suggest we remain therefore jovial and sympathetic, but keep our distances. We have a common person to protect, Heyla de Smet, but I wonder how long Louis

will listen to her. Sending her to Louis of Male was a masterly stroke, which worked far beyond our expectations. Was fate really at work, or our cunning? I hope we have not sent that girl into perdition and unhappiness for our means. We would have her on our conscience, as well as James van Artevelde!’

‘You are right,’ agreed Raes. ‘Lovers never remain lovers for long. After so many disputes, differences of opinion, diverging interests, a point is reached where lovers part. Married couples remain together because of the institution of marriage, so that new and sweet understanding sets in with time, but lovers separate. If Heyla and the count stay together, they would form the exception rather than the rule. Who knows? Maybe we are merely obdurate, old men! I know Heyla quite well. She is an honest girl, sure of her feelings. She is not a woman to fall for a handsome face, for a kind character only. She will also have enough money of her own not to need a count around her. She can live pleasantly on what her father can give her. Their love seems strong, I believe. It is not the love of two children, but the strong feeling of belonging to each other that is the characteristic of true, lasting love.’

‘You may be right. Tell me, Raes, who should we send as counsellors to Louis?’

‘You should be one, Gillis. I am too old for that job. My memory is failing and I tend to mix matters up, these days. The de Herts and the de Smets will not very much like being a counsellor either, meet with many other men in grand meetings. That leaves us with either Pieter Denout or my son Raes the Younger. I would think one Vresele would do!’

‘Yes! I shall not go either! I propose to send my son Boudin, though he is still young. Grand meetings seem to exhaust my patience too, these days. We could send Raes the Younger, Pieter Denout and Boudin. The count may well accept one man more. In such meetings, one more or less does not matter much.’

‘That is fine with me too. An awkward moment it was, when the count spoke of van Artevelde, wasn’t it?’

Gillis grinned, ‘yes, it was! I thought for a moment we would lose him, then. I feared the count’s trust would suddenly wane. Still, he seemed to accept what we told him, and I thought it best to answer him honestly. Maybe he felt more sympathy or comprehension for the figure of James van Artevelde than his father did.’

‘His trust is based on Heyla de Smet.’

‘It must be! How long will that last? I wonder how John de Smet is going to react about the situation of his daughter. We have manipulated him and her, Raes! She will be committing adultery, forfeit the purity of her soul. I had wished better for a Pharaïldis woman.’

‘I am not so stern and strict on Heyla, Gillis. The priests tell us about the sins of adultery, but Gerolf did not react so strictly tonight. God is love. Can He not forgive the sins of love? Who can tell the ways of God? If God determines our lives, why then did He bring Heyla and Louis together? Maybe much good comes from their union. Who can tell?’

‘No one indeed,’ Gillis smiled.

The men walked the rest of the way in silence.

Count Louis of Male stayed in the room of Wouter de Smet with only Heyla, John and me, Jehan Terhagen. I had no idea why I should be still in the hall, but I stayed, as the count has demanded. I was puzzled.

Louis of Male used his natural authority to start first. Heyla sat next to him. Their shoulders touched. Louis took Heyla’s hand in his.

‘I love your daughter Heyla,’ Louis confessed to John de Smet, ‘and Heyla confirmed she loves me too. Our relation is pure, honest and very real, and strong. I had to marry, and I could not marry Heyla. Had I wanted to marry Heyla, at my age, I would have been destitute as count and maybe even thrown somewhere in a dark pit, probably murdered shortly after, or

Heyla would have been quietly murdered by mercenaries. Somebody else of my family would have been declared count. I would not have been in a position to defend Heyla. So, now I am married to Margaret of Brabant, whom I do appreciate, but do not love. I beg for forgiveness to God and to you, John de Smet, but things are how they stand. Heyla and I, we belong to each other. We are determined to stay together. I want to take your daughter under my aegis. Can you, Master John, give us your blessing nevertheless?’

‘I find this relation very sad, Count Louis, for me and for my family,’ John replied. ‘Heyla is not an ordinary girl. I presume you would not have fallen in love with an ordinary girl. I too love Heyla, more than my life. I do not want to see her unhappy and sad. She has my blessing with her intentions, but I believe being lovers is a very volatile relationship, not necessarily one that may last. Please do not destroy yourselves when you fall out. What will happen to your children, for children there will be.’

‘I truly hope there will be children,’ Louis replied. ‘My children will be called bastards of Flanders. Their names will be known and I will not reject being their father. They shall marry noble men or women. I shall see to that. I thank you for your blessing. I have arranged something for Heyla too. I thought of two provisions for her. First, I propose to buy or to build a comfortable home, *a steen*, for her in Ghent. Heyla must be able to reside in Ghent whenever she wants to, to visit her family or live here for long periods, whenever she wants. I cannot always reside in Ghent, and I don’t want to have to meet Heyla in the awful *Gravensteen*, that dark behemoth of stone. Can you, John de Smet, build or buy her a fine steen? Please don’t arrange for a palace, for Heyla would be envied and hated. I shall send you my steward, so you can arrange for the payments with him.’

Count Louis of Male hesitated, paused, looked to Heyla, then to John, then to me. I still did not grasp what I was doing here. This was family business!

Louis said, ‘I cannot meet Heyla easily in Ghent. Too many people know me here. I do not like coming to her, hooded like a thief, hidden like a criminal. Therefore I thought of bestowing land and a manor on her. I can offer her one of three manors, one near Ieper, another one near Tournai. I don’t like these two sites, for too near to France, too near to open roads, too many knights around and lords I cannot really trust in the neighbourhoods. My third choice would be a place in the north, near Axel. There is a manor and lands a Beostenblijje that wait for a lord. Beostenblijje is a small village near the sea. The lord of Axel is a friend of mine. Beostenblijje is a God-forgotten, calm piece of land, out of the way of invading armies, out of the way of the great cities, far in the countryside. My issue with Beostenblijje is that it is situated far from Ghent, isolated, and I also don’t know what state the manor is in. So, when you, Ser Terhagen, spoke of your domain near Axel, I had a splendid idea! I suddenly saw hope shining through the clouds of my mind. Could you, Ser Terhagen, ride to Beostenblijje, assess the status of the manor, and tell me how much it would cost to repair the building, to bring it to excellent state for Heyla to live there? She should need a steward, servants, and so on. Beostenblijje should be secured with a moat, and be made a beautiful place for her to dwell in. I would like to know how much it would cost to have Heyla happy at that place. I would like to have the manor duly protected, and to have guards around her. Consider all these items, please. Heyla, Master John, could henceforth be called Heyla de Smet the Lady of Beostenblijje. I shall provide her with the necessary charters. You, Ser Terhagen, do you have charters? Is Terhagen a free manorial domain?’ I reflected on that question, knew not the answer, but replied rapidly, ‘no, I don’t think so, lord count!’

In actual fact, I wasn't sure! I knew charters or papers had been preserved for me in the convent of Ter Hage, but I had not yet bothered to ask for them. I owned the land, more was not needed.

'Give my steward the description of your lands. Do this truthfully. I will grant you a charter so that your domain will be considered a free manorial domain. You may call yourself from now on the Lord of Terhagen. In return, however, I would ask you to serve as the protector of Heyla de Smet and her children, to help her in everything she needs. Beostenblij is a handsome place. If you don't like it, Heyla, we'll find some other place for you. Beostenblij is not close to Male, but I can ride to your domain whenever I see a chance to flee from my court, and it is far enough so that I would not be followed. I'd like you, Ser Terhagen, to provide for lodging outside the manor for up to twenty guards. I may need an escort, you know!'

'I'll do as you ask, lord. I'll watch over Heyla as if she were my sister, which in a way she is. I consider myself as Heyla's uncle, for her mother is my sister in the family I was adopted in. I'll care for her.'

'Fine, then! By the way, if you want to be called Vresele of Terhagen or by another name, please state it to my steward. He'll make that official with the seal of the counts of Flanders! I am grateful to you.'

Louis of Male could be generous, I thought.

'I'll think about that, thank you, lord.'

'Well, that is settled,' the count sighed, satisfied.

A little later, he and Heyla kissed goodbye, held each other tenderly and tightly, and then we all left, Count Louis accompanied by his armed squire who had waited for him in the forge. The man had been stuffed with wine and pies by the Pharaïldis women. John de Smet and I walked home in the middle of the night. He walked to the *Veldstraat*, I to the Vresele house where I still had a room.

## Bad Tidings

After the Battle of Crécy, King Philip of Valois took some time to return to Paris. He held an army ready, but hesitated to attack King Edward who was besieging Calais with all the men he could muster, and whose troops grew by the month. He kept an army near Calais, but refused to attack the English.

Philip had issues in Paris, for when he called meetings of the Estates-General in his capital, to be held in 1347, the Estates did not withhold from showing their disdain at what had happened at Crécy. They reminded the king of the expenses of the war and they reproached him for having taken bad counsel, which was a covert blame for the defeat of Crécy. When Philip of Valois stressed the importance of defending the kingdom once more against assaults of the English, the Estates agreed very reluctantly on new subsidies. The men of the Estates more than ever resented the royal taxes, and they were convinced the government of the royal councillors had been led very badly. The king had installed new taxes on sales and on salt throughout the kingdom, very unpopular means of getting money in the treasury. Philip also proceeded to devalue the coinage of France, which led to increases of prices. Philip of Valois had to admit he could not tax France more than he had already done. His means to wage war against England were therefore limited.

The only good news seemed to be the choice for allegiance to France by Count Louis of Male, but Philip had not expected less, for Louis of Male was the son of Louis of Nevers, a man

who had served him loyally under any circumstance. In order to support Louis of Male's choice and to exert more pressure on the three great Flemish cities, Philip had once more Flanders placed under the papal interdict in May of 1347. This was entirely Philip's initiative, and it did not occur once to him the decision might anger Louis of Male. The interdict, after all, was not directed against the count but against the cities! The king also did not ask Louis of Male about his views on the matter.

In June of that year 1347, negotiations were held between France, Flanders and Brabant concerning the details of the marriage of Count Louis with Margaret of Brabant. While Louis remained in Conflans with his mother, he had abandoned his rights on the city of Mechelen in Brabant to Duke John III. Louis of Male regretted this donation, for he kept in his mind the Scheldt was a life-carrying artery of his county.

Almost at the same moment as the marriage of Count Louis, the town of Calais surrendered to King Edward III. Edward had brought substantial means to capture the harbour that was so near to England and so strategically positioned between Paris and Flanders. On the second of August of 1347, the French army left the environs of Calais, and on the fourth of August, the town surrendered, cursing the French king for having been abandoned to its fate. In mid-September, urged by the cardinals of the Pope, King Edward agreed on a truce with France, which included Scotland and Flanders, and which had to last until the eighth of July of 1348, but which would end only in April of 1351 on account of the events I, Jehan Terhagen, will explain further on.

On the eleventh of October of 1347, Emperor Lewis of Bavaria died. The German electors offered the succession as Holy Roman Emperor to King Edward III. Edward refused the offer! His focus was still on conquering France, his finances were low, he did not seek to add expensive titles to his name, and maybe he felt tired after the relentless war and campaigns he had led the previous years. His reputation was now so great, the English parliament might well have granted him everything he wanted, but Edward knew he could only ask so much of the English.

The death of Emperor Lewis of Bavaria gave rise to a war in Holland. Lewis's wife was Margaret of Holland, who returned in 1350 to rule over her lands, asked to do so by a part of the noble lords of Holland. Margaret was the sister of Count William IV of Holland, who was also Count William II of Hainault, but who had died childless. When Count William of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland had been killed in 1345, his sister Margaret had inherited the three major counties, and thus also Holland. She had appointed her son William, however, to rule over Holland as her representative. Not all the lords of Holland liked William. Margaret was supported in her return by only part of the nobility of Holland. The other part wanted her son, William, to continue to govern Holland. The nobles who supported Margaret and the house of Bavaria used white and blue colours in their standard. The Dutchmen hence called them the Cods, as cods also have bluish scales on their backs. The partisans of William then called themselves the Hooks, as cods were caught with hooks on lines. The Hooks sought to be allied to France, so Margaret and her Cods sought support from England. The war of the Cods and the Hooks raged in Holland throughout the year.

The year of 1348 was a quite tumultuous year for Flanders. The *Brugse Vrije* revolted in favour of the count of Flanders. It was to be expected that a new count would raise hopes in the knights of the countryside, in the knights of the old families in the cities, and in the smaller cities against the dominance of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper. Count Louis of Male fed

these revolts, which proved quite more successful than in the times of his father. He agreed with his councillors he could not act in any other way. Neither he nor the Pharaïldis men found other means of enforcing his authority in Flanders, the prerequisite for bringing peace in the county, as well as more balanced relations between the powers in the land. Louis of Male showed also little patience!

‘I must wage a war in my own county in order to gain peace,’ Louis of Male concluded one evening in the hall of Gillis Vresele’s house in Ghent. ‘Isn’t that absurd and contradictory? It saddens me so! I want peace and I have to sow conflicts!’

‘True,’ Gillis admitted. ‘The tensions are growing much faster than we imagined. Outbursts are bound to happen. When the revolts break out, somebody has to lead and become the most powerful. If not, anarchy will set in. We understand the necessity of leadership in Flanders. We do not advise you to make war, lord count, to fight against the cities. We only advise you to stand prepared, to contact people who can form an army for you. You must have your power in Flanders by groups that support you, and that can only be the knights of the castellanies, the knights of the cities, and the aldermen of the smaller towns. You may never have to fight against the large cities, for they are divided within.’

‘I know,’ Count Louis reacted, ‘but it is a damn shame I have to help fomenting trouble and dissent in my own county!’

‘That you don’t have to do,’ Raes van Iake the Elder joined in. ‘Only, when support for your lordship is offered, accept it, and form a standing army, an army you can call together rapidly, very rapidly, in the timespan of a few days. You will probably need such troops, and no count should remain without an army. Organise your army!’

Count Louis listened to what the Pharaïldis men told him, but he held a stern, worried face. When Dendermonde, Oudenaarde and Geeraardsbergen in the quarter of Ghent opened their gates to him, handed over to him the keys to their towns, he accepted graciously, and he provided these towns with garrisons, with men-at-arms he had gathered from the knights who sided with him, and for whom he paid from the revenue on taxes.

In the middle of the year 1348, the old families of the cities of Bruges and Ieper, encouraged by the audacious attitude of the count, revolted against the dominance of the weavers in their town. The weavers and anti-count factions were massacred. In these cities, Louis of Male sentenced to death many of the men who were known opposers to his government. Many others were banished from Flanders. The young count learned rapidly! Not all the sentences were pronounced by him, for he had the lords of the countryside and the aldermen of the cities who declared for him, to purge his opposers. Only Ghent seemed to resist this movement.

\*\*\*\*\*

During 1347 and even to about half of the following year, I, Jehan Terhagen, who called myself now officially Vresele of Terhagen, worked at my new castle. We made two distinctive changes to the original design. We did not place the castle higher, but we had to dig out the moat deeper for the water to flow well into it, around the structure at all seasons, and be renewed from the river. That allowed us, forced us even, to build deeper foundations. We placed an inclined, sloping wall from the short, horizontal, grass-covered terrain all around the castle, into the water. The slanting wall made it even more difficult to pass the moat and to place ladders against the walls. The width of the moat became larger. The second modification was a secret. I remembered how I had escaped from the farm of Old Terhagen through a small tunnel to the river. I had a tunnel be dug under New Terhagen, a tunnel that remained dry, from the castle to the direction of the bay of Axel, deep under the moat, deep in the earth. The tunnel was high enough for adult persons to walk through. We built this tunnel

in stone, so it cost a fortune, but in extreme situations we could all escape to far from the castle and run for the bay of Axel. Near the bay, I kept a small sailing boat, inside another low building, inside a boat-house. That building stood practically hidden in the bushes, surrounded by a tangle of reed and marsh grass that was extremely difficult to pass through, among lines of beeches, offering another escape.

By July of 1348, my castle was finished and I brought in my furniture and horses, and went to live there permanently. In the summer of 1348 I hired only one servant and his wife, who became also my cook. The man had been presented to me by Boudin Vresele. He was a former warrior, a mercenary from near Ieper, who had met a woman and wanted to settle in a quiet, secure place. He had fought in campaigns in France, so he appreciated the protection of the walls of a castle. His name was Ywen de Wilde, and his wife was called Kateline Dankers. They had two children of four and five, Ruebin and Kerstiaen. I allowed the entire family in. I did like the happy noise of playing children in my yard.

I was very active in that period. I had, at the end of 1347, given a close look at the manor of Beoostenblijje. It lay indeed not far from where my castle stood. Heyla de Smet had received a fine domain from the count. It consisted of much, very fertile polder land, from which also peat could be dug. She had a large wood nearby, a wood she could use for logs in winter to burn in her hearths, and where she might find fowl, rabbits, hares, and even boars. Next to the wood lay a large lake. Her manor stood so near the lake she could enjoy a fine view over the water. Beoostenblijje was an elegant house, about as large as the manor of Old Terhagen, fine and comfortable. Farther off she owned a large farm. The farm had walls all around it and a large gate. I surmised not much had to be done to secure a little better that farm.

The main issue was with the manor. It had probably formally merely been a hunting pavilion, though a quite large one. There were no walls around it, no moat, and the house had remained unoccupied for a long time. I brought Lammin Metsers to the manor. We discussed what could be done, then decided on a plan. We would bring the lake to very close the rear side of the manor. Luckily, the manor stood high and the walls of the house were thick. We would place a yard in front of the house and a wall around the rectangular manor, a gate in that wall. We would create a moat around the walls, and place also a drawbridge against the gate. Heyla would have a nice view only on the rear of her manor, so we thought of opening larger windows on that side, but on the second floor. Heyla would have to live on that floor, keep her kitchens below. That meant we had to make some modifications inside, and the rooms would have to be heated to chase out humidity, and be redecorated. The work on Beoostenblijje was urgent, so Lammin transferred a few men from my construction site to Beoostenblijje and then hired journeymen for the digging of the moat. He continued to supervise the works there throughout the autumn and the winter of the year. In the late spring of 1348, Heyla de Smet could come to live at Beoostenblijje.

Heyla brought her family, the de Smets and the Vreseles, to admire her domain. From then on, Count Louis of Male spent quite some time at Beoostenblijje in the arms of his mistress. He wasn't satisfied with the decoration, which we had indeed kept frugal, so the count ordered new Flemish furniture and tapestries and wooden panels to the walls. Wagon load after wagon load with the heaviest oak tables, nicely carved chairs, cupboards and chests were brought to Beoostenblijje. Louis of Male gave also many beautiful silver plates, vases and candelabras to Heyla. Four trusted men of the count could sleep in the manor. Lammin and I placed more quarters for escort guards against the new walls, so Heyla and Louis might feel protected and be with Heyla the only people really living in the manor. Two male servants and their families also lived inside the walls. When danger really loomed, Heyla could hide at

New Terhagen. Count Louis of Male also visited my castle, stayed a few days, and I remarked he liked the place. He did not particularly like the cats that played around his feet, though.

I am not very fond of dogs inside a castle. They are fine guardians, of course, but they can be wild, dangerous for children, and they are not too clean. Ywen and Kateline had brought a dog, a large shepherd, but I banished the animal to the farm. I do like cats, though. Cats hunt mice and rats. It was quite common in some houses of Ghent to see a mouse run from one side of the wall to the other while you were sitting in the hall, but such habits horrified me. No mouse should run over my bed in the middle of the night! I kept a big, grey cat at Terhagen, and two female cats. Ywen castrated the tomcat, so we kept the number of the animals in control, though with time two more cats sneaked in. Cats are extremely clean animals, intelligent, small, feline, keen on much dignity, and the female cats were as nice as a dog. In the evening, they would come to my hall, in winter attracted to the warmth of the hearth, and purr on my lap or sleep on the tapestries of my floor or on the cushions of my chairs. We adopted five cats in all in New Terhagen. We had to feed them, for we detected no mice or rats anymore, and I made sure by small openings in the gate and in a door of the manor they could come and go as they wished. The rodents had been chased out of the building by my cats.

Lammin Metsers called my castle Cat-Terhagen, and that name stuck as opposed to Old Terhagen. Heyla de Smet visited Cat-Terhagen often, and I sometimes also paid her a visit at Beostenblijje. I could not but remark how well I got along with Heyla. She would have made a fine wife, always smiling, always content, but I chased that idea quickly from my mind. Besides, Heyla had no eyes for me. We became good friends.

I worked hard. I bought much land in the polders of the bay of Axel. I bought almost every stretch of land I could put my hands on, with Vresele money. I also began buying land along the Scheldt, near Bornhem and Weert mostly. Lammin built us two farms after the summer of 1348, one near the bay, another near the Scheldt.

During the summer of 1348 we spent long evenings, Lammin Metsers, Geert van Dorp and I, discussing which stretches of land were the best to buy, talking about the crops we could sow, hiring farmers and workmen, and drawing plans to build dykes. The profits from the fields and the farms rose, modestly at first, not enough to pay for the investments, but then they soared when harvest came. We introduced cows and oxen and bulls on large expanses of meadows.

Lammin Metsers now worked almost exclusively for me. He became my construction boss. Late in 1348 I even sent him out to set up a construction shop in Ghent. We would build in Ghent. We became partners in that investment, and I never had to regret the money.

I also doubled once more the salary of Steward van Dorp, and asked him to manage daily the vast lands of me and of the Vresele family. He didn't farm anymore. He commanded farmers. We took in another farmer for Old Terhagen. Van Dorp now lived with his family in the manor of Old Terhagen as if he were a lord, but he was worth it. Van Dorp managed, grew rich, and I was constantly on the lookout for new investments. I had my own council with Lammin Metsers, Geert van Dorp and Lauwers Christiaens!

\*\*\*\*\*

Weird events happened in 1348, events that might have warned us of impending danger, had we watched and listened well. The strangest one happened in the capital of the duchy of Brabant, in Brussels.

The wife of a poor weaver, Beatrise Soetkens, heard voices in full daylight but saw nobody around her. It seemed the Virgin Mary was telling her Brussels needed her protection. Beatrise would have to travel to Antwerp and fetch there, in a church, the statue of the Mother of God, and bring the statue to safety in Brussels. Beatrise urged her husband therefore to row and sail her to the harbour of Antwerp on the Scheldt. This was relatively easy, for Antwerp lay downstream from Brussels over the Senne River and the Scheldt. When Beatrise arrived at the main church of Antwerp, the sexton refused her to grab the statue, whereupon the man was instantly turned into stone. Beatrise took the statue, and she escaped from Antwerp in the boat of her husband. Her husband was soon exhausted, for he had to row upstream and he could not sail against the wind. He had the current of the stream and the river against him. The boat arrived nevertheless at Brussels, quite miraculously. The power of the Virgin pushed the boat forward. Beatrise's husband could direct the boat to an open terrain, where a company of the crossbowmen of Brussels were training. Beatrise told the crossbowmen what had happened, so the crossbowmen took Beatrise and her husband in their protection. Even when men of Antwerp arrived in Brussels to claim the statue, they had to recognise a miracle only could have brought Beatrise back to her town. The companies of the crossbowmen brought the statue of the Virgin solemnly to their chapel, to the *Zavel* Church, the chapel built in 1304. The guild of the crossbowmen then promised to build another, larger church where their chapel stood, a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and also to organise a yearly procession. In this procession, called in Flemish the *Ommeganck* or walk around the town, the statue would be worn on the shoulders of the crossbowmen through the main streets of Brussels, so that the Virgin could see the town and the inhabitants she would protect. The *Ommeganck* became a famous tradition in Brussels!

The year 1348, and even more the next year, would become a time of great upheavals indeed for Brabant and Flanders, years also in which religious devotion was extraordinarily called upon. The Virgin had indeed issued a warning to the people of Brussels and Brabant!

\*\*\*\*\*

In August of 1348, the Franciscan monk Gerolf Vresele asked for an urgent session of the Pharaïldis Council. Since Count Louis of Male was to be invited, and since Heyla de Smet lived now, very much pregnant, at Beostenblijje, the meeting was organised at New Terhagen. This became also for me, Jehan Terhagen, an occasion to show off with my very new building to my friends. I could prove to them I could offer the space and had mastered the skills to organise such an important meeting. The women of the Pharaïldis had not been invited this time. I prepared lodging for the dozen or so men who were expected. Count Louis of Male had sent messengers to and fro, announcing he would be present. He would pass his nights normally at Beostenblijje. I nevertheless prepared the largest and finest room of Terhagen for him.

We all wondered why Gerolf, of all people, wanted a meeting in the heat of summer. What could a Fremineuren monk feel important to share with us, so important he had felt it necessary also to call in the count of Flanders?

We started the meeting of the Pharaïldis group at New Terhagen around noon, with a short meal. We ate slices of dried meat and fish, bread and cheese, milk, and for those who wanted, wine or beer. Count Louis of Male arrived while we were eating. He greeted us effusively and joined in. I studied the count, then. Louis of Male was a tall, well-proportioned man. He was dressed in a yellow jupon embroidered with the black lion of Flanders, a very ostentatious dress I thought, but he was the count, wasn't he? He had thrown off his ermine-trimmed

cloak. He wore his hair short, his meticulously cheeks shaven. His eyes were piercing, sparkling with intelligence, but dark in my hall, passing somewhat nervously over us. He seemed not entirely at ease in our presence. His face was made up of regular, somewhat sharp features, moulded for the exercise of power. His face was proud and stern, while youthful.

We remarked how serious, sad, and worried Gerolf looked, but he wouldn't say anything at dinner about what he wanted us to meet about. He said little while we chewed, which was not his normal way of doing. He usually was quite a garrulous man! He merely stated he wanted us all together on a very urgent matter, and attentive. Our real meeting started in the early afternoon. We sent the servants and the women out. We went to my main hall and took our seats around the table. Count Louis of Male also said little, he too looked worried.

A little later, without much ado, Gerolf Vresele stood from his chair and addressed us. 'Count Louis and dear friends,' he began, 'you no doubt wonder why I asked you for this sudden meeting. The hour is grave. No war is imminent, no great battle, no revolt threatens in Flanders, but a danger that is much greater and extremely horrible threatens our lives!'

We looked at each other. What was Gerolf talking about? What greater danger did we know but a war in Flanders? Would Gerolf announce a new deluge?

'I have received news,' Gerolf continued solemnly, 'of a malicious but invisible cloud that advances slowly to our region like a southern wind-swept storm, and which kills thousands of people in a few days, without anybody comprehending why the cloud advances, even in contrary winds, who sent it, from where it originated or where it will stop. I had word from my correspondents and friends of Franciscan abbeys in France and England of the threat the cloud represents. From letters sent to me by my brother-monks, I could conclude that the invisible cloud covered Italy and may have come from lands even farther east and south. It has reached France. The cloud or wave reached Marseille in January of this year 1348. In February, it had passed to Montpellier, by May to Narbonne and Toulouse. By June it had advanced northerly to the towns of Bordeaux, Dijon, Caen in Normandy, and the suburbs of Paris. It has now engulfed Paris and begins to move into Picardy, to Amiens. It may soon reach us. I also received word from England. I believe the cloud will arrive in Flanders in the autumn of this year and strike in Ghent at the latest in the spring of next year. One of my correspondents wrote to me the cloud seems to advance slower in winter, so we may be affected only by the late spring of next year.'

We blemished around the table. Our mouths fell open, but nobody could bring a cup to his lips to drink from the excellent white wine I had brought over for this special occasion from Ghent. We looked at each other. Had Gerolf lost his mind? Was this the wandering of a disturbed soul?

'In fact,' Gerolf said wryly, 'we don't know what exactly is going to submerge us with evil and death. Is it a cloud or not? Is it a malignant wave in the air? Is it God's breath? It may be some sort of invisible wave, but it advances over vast distances, sometimes quickly, sometimes more slowly. The evil comes to certain people, not to everybody, causing sudden swellings on the body, blood oozing out of people in the urine or in blood-filled excrements. The people are ill with fevers then, they suffer from much sweating, and they spit blood continuously. Death may happen within one day. The pestilence of the cloud is an illness, a sickness that cannot be cured. The doctors are desperate, for they cannot help. They have no cure. Prayers do not help, holy masses do not help, holy blessings do not change the course of the sickness.

A monk who lived in Avignon wrote to me as many as four hundred people died in one day, and it seems half of Avignon has already passed away or is dying right now. The pope first

barricaded his court inside the palace, allowing nobody to enter. The people of Avignon had to had to pass victuals through a small door. Now, he seems to be truly caring for the sick under the impulse of his doctor, Guy de Chauliac. He has had to consecrate the Rhone River as holy ground, so that the corpses could be thrown into the river instead of being buried. Burials in holy ground became sheer impossible, for so many burials had to be handled by so few gravediggers. His astronomers, among whom Johannes de Muris, have concluded the pestilence has been caused by a rare conjunction of the planets Saturn, Jupiter and Mars. It seems the weakest of the communities, the children and the women, are stricken first and die first. The Franciscans warned me also of the fact that since so many people die so quickly, and since so many people die, desperations ravages the territories that are reached. The people, knowing and fearing they will die soon, lose faith in God, the Virgin and the saints who also seem powerless to stop the pestilence. The people therefore indulge in all sorts of debauchery and lawlessness. They commit crimes, such as theft and murder, and fornication.’ Gerolf lowered his head in shame. We were by then too horrified to exclaim our surprise. I, for one, could hardly believe what Gerolf Vresele had come to tell us. Surely, this story was exaggerated! Such a sickness, so many deaths, could not be possible! Nothing so horrible existed on earth! How many people lived in Ghent? More than sixty thousand men, women and children? Surely, having thirty thousand people die in a few weeks or months’ time was impossible.

‘Is this cloud, this wave, this pestilence the wrath of God, the work of the devil or is it a natural disaster that spreads?’ William van Lake dared to ask.

We were all astonished William was still using his rational mind. His mind had not been numbed by the horror of the images Gerolf created inside our head.

‘Maybe the wrath of God had been released on humankind,’ Gerolf Vresele sadly replied, ‘maybe the illness is sent by the devil to punish us and drag us down to hell for our transgressions and sins, to kill the priests and the monks and the bishops of the church, but I have it very difficult to believe either of those hypotheses. The monks who wrote me feared God and the devil, but I say God is love! We know from the Bible God can punish with fire and water and with calamities such as sicknesses. This happened in Egypt, we can learn from the Bible, in ancient, pre-Christian times. But why would God punish so fearfully after having sent His son to redeem us? The devil must be feared, but God is so much more powerful than the devil. God could stop the work of Satan in an instant, and protect His devotees. Prayers do not help. Having led a pious life does not help.

Some blame the Jews who have crucified our lord Jesus Christ, but the Christ is forgiveness incarnated, Christ was destined to die on the cross to redeem us. This had been ordained by God, so the Jews should not be blamed. At best, the Jews were merely the instrument of God. Had the Jews really caused the death of Christ, then again could God have saved His son, part of Him? Had He wanted to punish the Jews, He could have done so a thousand years ago! Had he wanted to punish the Jews, he could have slain them easily, yet the sickness slays all, Christians and Jews alike! I believe the illness is a natural disaster, of earthly origin, maybe sent by God to test us, but the sickness kills the worst criminal not sooner than the most devoted. Innocent people, good Christians, die as well as abominable sinners. I don’t know what to think!’

‘Has anybody seen, felt, smelled the cloud?’ William asked on.

‘No, no! When the monks, and now I also, have used the word of cloud or of wave, it was only in a metaphorical way,’ Gerolf explained. ‘The pestilence spreads like an invisible cloud in the sky and advances rapidly, like a wave that ripples down or up a river, but the monks made no note to me of having seen or felt anything. The illness just advances, spreads. It reaches a street and then the next, the side-streets, and then it kills in the next street. It seems

to abate after a few months, carrying death and desolation in its path. It may strike the mother and the father of a family, several children, and leave one or two children unscathed but orphaned.'

'Have you heard of this pestilence, Count Louis?' Gillis Vresele asked.

'Yes, yes, I have,' Count Louis of Male replied. 'I heard rumours. Some knights and lords of my court truly feared the illness, but most did not believe what travellers to my court told. We thought the stories grossly exaggerated. Joan, the daughter of King Edward III of England, has died from a pestilence on her way to marry King Alphonso of Castile. I heard that from our ambassadors to England.

I heard nothing from the state in Avignon, except that Pope Clement VI has bought the town of Avignon for eighty thousand Florins from Queen Joanna of Naples, who is also the countess of the Provence region. That happened in June of this year. The illness must have arrived a little afterwards, for Joanna fled to Avignon to hide from the German Emperor. Until now, I also thought such horrible illness as father Gerolf describes was impossible! Illnesses have spread before, I was told, for instance among cattle, but not illnesses that bring terrible death to us, humans in such huge numbers! The Reverend Gerolf has thoroughly frightened me, I have to admit!'

We remained silent. We did not know what we should believe. We were paralysed, we could not think clearly.

'Wait, wait, wait, This cannot be!' William van Lake cried, holding his hand at the height of his chest. 'Let us think! If this pestilence, this cloud, is an illness, there must be a cure. Have the monks, your correspondents, written to you about a cure?'

'They all wrote there was no cure!' Gerolf shook his head. 'The doctors burn myrrh and oils to purify the air. They spread perfumes. They sprinkle the floors with vinegar and rosewater, they have people wash with vinegar diluted in water, but nothing seems to help.'

'Those are measures of purification, of cleansing,' William derived. 'Maybe cleanliness helps. You spoke about the pope. The pope locked himself inside his palace and closed his castle. Has the pope been touched by the illness so far?'

'No, not to my knowledge. I haven't heard the pope has died. Not yet!'

'The pope isolated himself from the town, from the people. Maybe isolation helps. Maybe the pestilence is spread from person to person, and so spreads. Maybe it has to be handed over.'

'Maybe. One monk remarked that the cities were more severely hit by deaths than the villages in the countryside. Many more people die in the cities than in the countryside.'

'That also may mean isolation may indeed stop the pestilence,' William remarked again astutely. 'Have you read any other such remarks?'

'The Jews and the nobility seems to suffer less than Christians and commoners.'

William thought, then said, 'that fits. The knights live in castles, which they can close to newcomers who are infected by the pestilence. Knights in the cities go oftener to bathes. But Jews? Why would Jews be touched less? That seems to point to a supernatural cause, but Jews sin as much as we, if only by usury, and why would God want to punish Jews less than Christians? I would have thought the opposite!'

'Maybe because we, Christians, are supposed to know better,' Gillis Vresele intervened, 'but you stated knights bathe more than commoners. Using your same logic, Jews must clean themselves ritually more often than we do. Common people in the cities go to baths much less.'

'Yes, yes, that is it, then,' William van Lake exclaimed. 'Isolation and cleanliness do help, though they do not stop the disease! The disease spreads from one person to another by the

touch, so isolation helps. Cleanliness halts or kills the sickness. We have already found two powerful means of avoiding the pestilence!

‘Some cleanliness is something we can teach the people,’ Count Louis of Male interrupted, ‘but how would it be possible to isolate people? People must eat, so they must go to the butcher to get meat, and to the baker for bread. People must work, receive orders for their work or produce, pass on the result of their work. Otherwise they starve. Isolation stops all interaction between people. Isolation is impossible to realise! In earlier times a peasant could survive on his own, live from his farm and from his fields and meadows. This has become impossible in our times!’

‘It has, it has,’ William van Lake stammered, ‘and so the illness spreads. Isolation will not help the majority of the people. I’m very much afraid the people will also not believe cleanliness helps. But isolation and cleanliness can help smart people, can help us, a lot!’

‘How is that?’ Count Louis wondered.

He was quite astonished at what William asserted.

‘If indeed the pestilence is passed from person to person, you, count, could hide in one of your isolated castles, take provisions with you for a time of something like six months, pull up your drawbridge and let no living soul in. If isolation helps, you’ll survive!’

We saw Count Louis thinking about this way of living.

‘Maybe,’ he agreed, ‘maybe one or other lord may thus survive, but in my case it won’t work! I am the count of Flanders! If my people suffer, I must remain the count. Otherwise I shall be rejected as count. There will be much to organise. I cannot hide inside a castle for six months!’

‘That is very brave of you, lord count,’ William continued. ‘You can try cleanliness, then. Bathe often, as often as you can, not once a week but once or twice a day. Vinegar bites, so wash with some vinegar in the water. Spread vinegar and rosewater in your castle.’

‘Are you a doctor?’ Count Louis asked.

‘I’m afraid not, lord count,’ William grinned, ‘but haven’t we, the Pharaïldis men, applied logic thinking more than other people and won by it? There is nothing wrong in using all the information we can get about the pestilence, think logically about it, and draw conclusions. There is no need to be a doctor for that. Besides, doctors seem to know very little about this pestilence. If they do not have a cure, what can they do?’

‘Sweet Jesus, William is right,’ Gerolf exclaimed before Count Louis could retort. ‘I am going to read over and over all the letters I received and try to find other such simple clues. Maybe there is more hidden in those letters! William, can you come to the Fremineuren and read with me?’

‘Of course, gladly,’ William nodded.

‘Fine, fine,’ Gillis Vresele then said, out for conclusions always, as true *Gentenaars* were.

‘Our trade demands us to be in contact with people constantly. If we stop seeing and talking to people, we may all be ruined within a few months’ time. We can bathe more often, but we should organise.’

‘We can send the ones we love, the weakest, into the countryside, and not allow anybody to come near our manors,’ Raes van Lake proposed.

‘We can do that, easily,’ I added. ‘What better isolation than a castle? My friends, the castle of New Terhagen, clean and new, is open to you! I can hold fifty people inside Terhagen and take in enough provisions for a few months, maybe not six months, but the farm of Old Terhagen, well managed and kept equally isolated, can procure the rest!’

Gillis Vresele began to order everyone about.

‘I shall have to stay in Ghent. Somebody shall have to stay. Our properties and our trade need be managed. You, Jehan Terhagen, you can stop a while buying and selling land, but do what you can to isolate our farms, then you lock yourself into your fortress. My wife will not want to leave me alone. Heinric, my son, works in the *Schepenhuis*, he will be needed to organise matters in Ghent, so he shall have to stay too, and help me. My son Evrard, who has studied to become a priest and monk, and who is with Gerolf at the Fremineuren abbey, I would like to move with Boudin to Terhagen. Terhagen will need some spiritual help. I shall have to take over Boudin’s trade for a while.’

‘I too shall stay in Ghent,’ Wouter de Smet told. ‘My wife will refuse to leave Ghent. John and his wife Marie might go and live with John’s daughter Heyla at Beoostenblijje, with your permission, Count Louis. Their son Wouter the Younger can go with them.’

‘I would be pleased to have Heyla feel accompanied by her family in hard times,’ Count Louis said. ‘Of course, others of your families can come and live at Beoostenblijje. I shall of course remain at Male, and not break the isolation of Beoostenblijje!’

‘I and my wife Zwane, we also will have to remain in Ghent,’ Raes van Lake the Elder told.

‘I too shall not leave Ghent,’ declared Raes the Younger. ‘Too much of my trade and of my weaving orders are in Ghent and have to be finished. Mechtild will want to stay with me, but I would like my daughter Avezoete and my son Boudin to stay at New Terhagen. Thank you, Jehan!’

We then looked at John Denout.

‘I too must stay in Ghent,’ John decided, ‘with my wife Selie. My son Pieter, his wife Kerstin and their son Martin and daughters Wivine and Quintine should go to Terhagen.’

Pieter Denout objected, ‘no, no, no! My wife and I, we must also stay in Ghent. I must lead our business on. My son and daughters I shall send to Terhagen, yes!’

‘I too, I must stay in Ghent,’ Arnout de Hert said quickly, ‘and my wife Marie won’t leave her sister Selie. I suppose my son John will not leave Ghent either, but he can live in one of our river boats on the Scheldt and avoid too many contacts once the pestilence spreads. He can even rapidly sail away. My daughter Nete is finally dating a fine man of Ghent; she will refuse to leave now. I would like my grandson to come to Terhagen!’

‘So,’ I concluded, ‘I may expect Evrard and Boudin Vresele with Alise, Avezoete and Boudin van Lake at Terhagen, as well as Martin, Wivine and Quintine Denout, with Clais de Hert and young Boudin van Lake. That should be no problem at all! I’ll start preparing my castle as for a long siege, keep everybody strictly inside New Terhagen. I shall expect them at the latest by mid-September. I’ll wait until the first signs of the pestilence have arrived south of Axel, then pull up my drawbridge. I will not even let any of you in!’

‘I shall feel better to have Heyla’s brother at Beoostenblijje,’ Count Louis said, ‘with his family. Have you thought about protection? We may expect roaming bandits to want to profit from the chaos of the illness. They may attack manors and castles. I can do something about that by keeping a small force of armed men in the countryside of Flanders. I’ll send a garrison of ten men-at-arms to Beoostenblijje, but keep them outside the manor. How about you, Ser Terhagen?’

‘I’ll have sufficient men and young people to defend the castle,’ I hastened to add.

‘I can send you two veteran mercenary warriors,’ Boudin Vresele proposed. ‘I use their services as guards when I travel. They are a bit special, but they should be glad to find safety inside a castle. They know well how to handle the sword, the mace and crossbows! They can help organise the defence of New Terhagen. They will want to come with their family.’

‘Fine,’ I agreed, ‘they will be welcome’.

‘I cannot, absolutely not, close and isolate Flanders,’ Count Louis of Male regretted. Our borders are too long and no natural barriers such as mountains separate us from Picardy or Brabant and Hainault. I can try to isolate Male, and the remark about bathing is interesting. I would like already to see the faces of my courtiers, lords and ladies, when I’ll order baths each week. I hope, Reverend Gerolf, that you can bring us more news of a cure for the coming pestilence. I shall send out men to France and England for more information, and take your words more seriously than I have so far. Any additional information, I’ll share with you. You, William van Lake, seem to have some kind of instinct for asking the right questions and bring the tiniest detail to good use. I am impressed! Father Gerolf, please share all your information with Master William! Consider you two henceforth in the direct service of the count of Flanders. I want to hear from you. Send me letters with news. Maybe you can come up with some cure or prevention. I propose for us to meet again next month, here at Terhagen, or at Beostenblijje, but only if the pestilence has not reached us yet.’

‘Agreed!’ the Pharaïldis men answered in choir.

‘My friends,’ Count Louis of Male ended, ‘I just realised that if what Father Gerolf told us is right, thirty thousand people might die in Ghent, fifteen thousand in Bruges and ten thousand in Ieper, and many tens of thousands more in the countryside, even if the countryside is hit less than the cities. We may not be able to do much against this pestilence, but we must think of what such a disaster on that awful scale may mean for our industry and our trade, for our agriculture. Please, join me in thinking about a future after such a disaster. Will this be the apocalypse after all, or will Flanders survive? I truly thank you for having called me to your meeting. You scared me almost to death, but it is far better to be scared than to have to face a catastrophe totally unprepared. Let us be scared and work! I had no idea about how badly France and England have been touched by the pestilence. The situation must be worsening there as we speak. We must prepare and pray the Lord to preserve us. Pray is the only thing we can do for now. I pray the Lord God to spare our loved ones.’

The Pharaïldis men stood from their chairs, and joined their prayers to Count Louis’s. They said the ‘Our Father’ together.

Finally, they concluded with a thundering, ‘Amen!’

## Good Tuesday

In the month of September of 1348, at the end of the summer, the pestilence that ravaged Europe had infected almost the whole of England and of France. So many people died in the cities, that the corpses could not be buried anymore as rapidly as should. The priests consecrated entire fields as graveyards, and in many towns even that was not enough. As the pestilence spread quickly, hundreds of victims succumbed each day in the direst of circumstances, often without being helped in the least.

In Paris, as much as eight hundred people died each day. The corpses lay putrid, abandoned in the gutters of the streets for days on, rotting, covered with blood and pus, stinking and being half devoured by dogs and rats. The images of the corpses were gruesome examples of the breakdown of communal care. Ultimately, the bodies would be fetched, thrown on carts, on barrows, or on simple wooden boards placed on wheels, and carried to burial places where almost nobody received a separate grave because no gravediggers were available. Only the very wealthy could still bury their loved ones decently, and more often than not the members of the family dug the grave themselves. The other corpses were thrown in common pits. The

women and the young died in greater proportions, probably because they were the most vulnerable. People died inside their houses, entire families died inside, and then the house would remain uninhabited, prey to thieves. These corpses decomposed, for nobody but thieves dared to enter the houses for fear of being infected. Thieves did not touch the corpses. They stole what they could find, and left.

It became gradually clear to the doctors that the pestilence spread by touch from person to person. In the houses, the women in the first place cared for the sick, so they were also the most exposed to the sickness. Monks and nuns working in the hospitals died in great numbers. Nobody else, but an occasional doctor for the rich, would accept to enter a house struck by the sickness.

Two different sicknesses seemed to be at work. From one sickness, the one that caused swellings in the armpits and groins as first signs, one died from two to seven days after the first swellings appeared. The swellings would spread, often over large surfaces of the skin. The swellings would blacken, probably from the infected, coagulated blood inside, they would burst and spread pus and blood. The sick vomited blood. A sick person died generally after four or five days. A few people survived after seven days, and recovered even. Afterwards, they did not catch the sickness anymore.

From the other sickness, which seemed to be rarer, one suffocated, suffered as though one could not breathe anymore, and died the same day or only one day later. One did never recover from this kind of sickness. The sufferings were atrocious, but at least one died quicker.

In the large cities, practically half the population died. In normal times, the bells of the churches sounded at funeral masses, but so many masses had to be celebrated that the bells did not stop anymore, which was such a bad omen and a sad sounding, the aldermen forbade the priests to continue sounding the bells.

In those months, Pope Clement VI, who courageously cared with his doctors for the ill, issued a bull in which he wrote the pestilence was a punishment for the sins of the Christians, for the sins of greed, adultery, blasphemy, avarice, and lack of religious zeal. The wrath of God had struck the Christian world, like the flood of the Bible.

The pope also urged the Christians not to blame others, and certainly not to blame the Jews for the coming of the pestilence. The Jews had not poisoned the wells of the Christians, had not cast evil spells. The bull forbade forcibly converting the Jews to Christendom. Christians who pursued the Jews had been seduced into violence by the devil! The pope therefore asked the clergy to take the Jews under the protection of the church. This was rarely done. The Jews were being massacred everywhere. In the town of Strasbourg alone, more than two thousand Jews were burned at the stake.

Most people believed the pestilence had a supernatural character, and could therefore not be avoided. Priests, monks and bishops died in large numbers, despite praying. The people regarded these deaths as the rightful punishment for the debauchery and sins of the church. As a result, the authority of the clergy dwindled.

The doctors did not find a cure. They tried purifying the air by burning all sorts of herbs inside rooms, with little effect. They wore red gowns and large, purple hoods to ward off the sickness, but the doctors too died, soon after having touched the ill.

Some people never caught the illness, but nobody knew why.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the city of Ghent, Geeraard Denijs, the dean of the weavers in the year of the murder of James van Artevelde, did not remain for long the man who ruled the town. He lost the '*Beleet der Stede*' already in August of the next year, 1346. Also Simon Parijs, the dean of the small guilds, who had been like Denijs a fervent opposer to James van Artevelde, had been replaced by then. The new aldermen from 1346 to 1348 were men who sympathised more with the ideas of James van Artevelde than with Geeraard Denijs. They supported the king of England, refused to recognise the authority of the count, and preferred the government of Flanders by the three members, by the cities of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper, who each ruled as despots over their quarter, over their part of Flanders. In the period from the fifteenth of August of 1348 to the fourteenth of August of 1349, John van de Velde was the dean of the weavers, and he was the most powerful person in the town. In 1348, most of the people feared the pestilence that might come to Flanders, but they preferred to believe Flanders would be spared.

At the end of August of 1348, the city of Aalst appealed once more to the count of Flanders. The aldermen of the town asked Louis of Male to assist them in their efforts to throw off the yoke of the dominance of Ghent. Count Louis of Male could enter Aalst at the head of a small army and place a garrison of his newly formed, loyal troops to hold the city. An army of militiamen of Ghent marched to Aalst, besieged the town, and set up camp in the vicinity. The militia of Ghent aimed to recapture the town, as the aldermen of Ghent had already done successfully in the times of Count Louis of Nevers. The aldermen of Ghent also appealed, as usual, to Bruges and Ieper for assistance.

When the troops of Bruges arrived, by mid-September, they quickly reconciled with the count. The town of Bruges had already fallen under the influence of Louis of Male and of the *poorter*-knights in the city. The government of the city had turned in favour of the authority of the count. The militia of Bruges joined the count's army.

The troops of Ghent and Ieper, having to face a strong armed force, were obliged to halt the siege of Aalst. The militiamen of Ghent returned to their hometown. Ghent then prepared for an assault of the count's army. The troops of Ghent destroyed the bridges at Deinze and Gavere and at other places on the rivers, and they sank the ferry-boats at other places. Count Louis of Male indeed moved his army to Ghent, but seeing the city too well defended, he marched on to Kortrijk, where he arrived end September. He rode with a strong contingent of knights to Bruges, which opened its gates and its welcoming arms to the count. Louis of Male and his counsellors quenched all resistance in Bruges. They imprisoned Gillis van Coudenbroeck, the former captain and leader of the town. They imprisoned many other men, known opposers to the count, and banished more men. Many people, many weavers and cloth merchants who had supported the former regime of the three members, fled the town. These acts of revenge caused uproar and dismay in Bruges, for the count had promised to respect the freedom of the city and offered amnesty to the opposers of his power. At the beginning of October 1348, the weavers assembled in armour and arms on the market square in front of the belfry, shouting they wanted the prisoners to be released, and the banished and fled men to be allowed to return to the city. The heavily armed troops of the count did not hesitate. They attacked the weavers in the square and crushed them under the hooves of their destriers. The weavers were only lightly armed. They proved no match for the men-at-arms and knights of Louis of Male. The weavers were massacred.

The day after, the weavers had to depose arms. More than two hundred twenty prominent weavers were banished from the town. Louis of Male blamed the revolt of the weavers to hotheads who had preferred to resist him and thereby caused a new revolt. The weavers had tried to sow discord between him and the city, he claimed, and so he had defeated the uproar, so that peace could return to the town.

The count of Flanders then turned against Ieper and Ghent. Once more, he promised to spare and forgive the *poorters* who surrendered to him, and also not to punish anybody, as well as to respect the privileges and charters of the towns. As Ghent and Ieper refused to yield, Louis of Male blocked the roads and the waterways, hoping to starve the cities in the end, hoping to force them thus into submission. This blockade lasted from the fourteenth of October to mid-December.

In December, the prolonged diplomatic efforts of Count Louis of Male with King Edward of England met with some success. King Edward was again low in finances. He had signed the previous month a truce with France because of lack of funds, and also because his land was ravaged by the pestilence. Now, Edward tried to put his relations with Flanders in the right order. Edward and the representatives of Louis of Male reached an agreement by which the count allowed the cities of Flanders to remain the allies of England. He still refused to do homage to Edward as king of France, remaining loyal to his oaths to Philip of Valois, but he had a special clause of reconciliation inserted in the treaty concerning Ghent and Ieper. Count Louis's counsellors had to make sure Ghent and Ieper did not receive help of armed forces sent by the king of England. Male obtained from Edward to agree that Ghent and Ieper should recognise the authority of the count. The count guaranteed to respect the privileges of the cities, and forgiveness for their opposition to him. The cities could continue to recognise Edward as the rightful king of France. Louis of Male also succeeded in convincing Edward he would not, like his father, take up arms against England in the army of France. This treaty was signed at Dunkirk on the twenty-fifth of November 1348, in the presence of representatives of the cities of Flanders, among which also a delegation of Ghent. Although the delegations of the cities witnessed the signing of the treaty, they hesitated in ratifying it. Edward and Louis of Male ratified the Treaty of Dunkirk on the tenth of December.

The representatives of Ghent and Ieper started new negotiations with the count, and Count Louis confirmed in a specific charter of the thirteenth of December he would guarantee the privileges and freedoms of the cities. He promised amnesty to the inhabitants who had opposed him until then. When this charter had been signed, the troops of the count lifted the blockade of Ghent and Ieper.

The city of Ieper immediately allowed the count's warlord, the lord of Halewijn, to enter the town with his troops. It did not last long until the same subterfuges as in Bruges were used by the lord of Halewijn to retaliate. Ser van Halewijn claimed he had heard of an impending revolt of the weavers, which may well have been true. He imprisoned, killed and banished he opposers to the count. King Edward of England appealed strongly to Count Louis of Male to spare at least the former captain of Ieper, John van Houtkerke, and Louis conceded to this, but many other leaders were decapitated in the market square of Ieper. Ieper submitted entirely to Count Louis and to his knights and to the old families who had since always supported the counts of Flanders.

Many weavers and other opposers of Bruges and Ieper, opposers to the rule of the counts of Flanders, fled to Ghent with their stories of the harsh, bloody repression by the army of the count. When the aldermen and the weavers of Ghent heard what had happened at Bruges and Ieper, they decided not to open their gates to the army of Count Louis of Male, and to resist his domination, despite the agreements of Dunkirk.

Despite the obvious, strong suspicions of the aldermen and the leading weavers of Ghent against the trustworthiness of the count's promise, negotiations and talks between Ghent and

the count did not stop. The aldermen did not dare to leave the town, in fear of reprisals, so they sent now monks and priests to find an agreement with the count. The city went so far as to beg for the pardon of the count. The aldermen and the weavers remained much divided over what attitude Ghent should show towards the count. The army of Count Louis marched then to Ghent, led by the lord of Steenhuise and Ser Louis van den Walle, but they waited at some distance of the town.

A group of inhabitants of Ghent, wishing to submit to the count and so save their lives and hope for the count's clemency, left Ghent to meet with the troops of Louis of Male, which camped at that time near the small town of Deinze. These men proposed to be received by the count, and tell him they accepted his authority. They were soon followed by the people of the large suburb of Saint Peter of Ghent, people who agreed with the abbot of the abbey of Saint Peter, who had already sworn obeisance to the count in November. While these men marched out of Ghent, they were attacked by a group of weavers. The men of Saint Peter nevertheless held off the opposers to the count, arriving at Deinze, where they joined the army of Count Louis.

On the seventh of January 1349, Count Louis of Male had letters read in Ghent in which he promised yet again to harm nobody who would leave Ghent within two days, to submit to him. He promised full amnesty to everyone who left the town in free will. After these two days, Louis threatened to do with any living soul in Ghent as pleased him. As a result, the landowner-*poorters*, the fullers, and many guildsmen of the smaller guilds also, joined the men of the suburb of Saint Peter near the *Rijsbrug*, a bridge over the *Leebeek*, a small river, near *Afsnee*. Among the men who left Ghent were also the butchers, the shippers and the fishermen. The weavers refused to leave town. They destroyed the most prominent houses of the butchers, their guild hall and the house of the dean of the butchers.

The weavers inside Ghent were by then desperate. They opened new negotiations with the count. Louis of Male granted them once again amnesty, but he demanded now one hundred and fifty hostages. Of these, one hundred eighteen were delivered to the count at Oudenaarde, but thirty-two hid or fled. The remaining thirty-two men were replaced by the weavers somewhat later, and also sent to the count. On the ninth of January of 1349, the last of the delegations to negotiate with the count, a delegation of eight monks, left Ghent, accompanied by the last thirty-two hostages demanded by Louis of Male.

The weavers who had remained inside the city were then again divided over what they should do next. Yes, they had sent hostages, but their confidence in the count waned once more. They refused to yield to the entreaties of the warlords of the count to leave the city. They occupied the Friday Market and the neighbouring streets and houses. They thought to make a last stand there, in the *kuipe*, in defence against the army of the count. Despite the fact they had already delivered their hostages, had begged for clemency, had even appealed to the duke of Brabant to plead with his daughter, Margaret, the count's wife, they hesitated to surrender. They could not bring themselves to trust the count. They suspected that, as in Bruges and Ieper, they would be wiped out, killed and banished, losing all authority in the town, and be severely punished.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the Friday Market, John van de Velde cried, ' friends, we have fought to assert the freedoms of our city over the imperiousness of the counts. We are not going to renege on those efforts

and hand over power to the current count, so that he can re-establish the old institutions of dominance by the landowner-knights over the city, over our industry and trade!’

Several hundred guildsmen, most of the guild of the weavers, stood with flying banners, with the pennants of their groups and the flags of the militia of the quarters of Ghent in the Friday Market. They had come to listen to speeches by their deans and by the aldermen who were opposed to the count. They expected their leaders to tell them which group would have to defend which part of the walls of Ghent.

Before the dean of the weavers could begin to dispatch his orders, other groups of armed men poured in from the various side streets towards the church of Saint James. The landowner-knights of Ghent had called their men and supporters to assemble. These arrived in great numbers. They formed tight rows in front of the weavers. John van de Velde whitened around the nose when he remarked how hundreds of men from the small guilds came to stand behind the knights. A little later only, a terrible sound of pipes and drums was heard, and a very large group of fullers ran from behind the church to reinforce the already considerable group of knights. John van de Velde realised the fullers had marched from Deinze to enter the city, which meant the gates of the town were open to the army of Count Louis. The fullers had not forgotten the humiliation and the many deaths inflicted upon them by the weavers at Bad Monday, so they had come to take revenge. They noted wryly that now the weavers stood to the side of the river Leie, to the quays and to the only bridge that gave access from the Friday Market to the other side of the river. Too few weavers, if any at all, had been left to defend the gates of the city, so the butchers and the fullers had been able to pass the gates unhindered. The fullers joined the forces of the knights and the small guilds. They were accompanied by the fearful contingents of the butchers and the bakers. These men were led by the knights Solomon Borluut and Gerolf Bette. Among the fullers ran also Pieter and Martin Denout. They were the only Pharaïldis men present that day in the Friday Market.

The fullers saw Geeraard Denijs, the murderer of James van Artevelde, stand next to the dean John van de Velde, and many voices shouted revenge against Denijs, the man who had caused the death of friends and neighbours and colleagues only a few years ago. The weavers trembled under these shouts, for the fullers had finally come to take revenge on them. Geeraard Denijs and John van de Velde stood with their standard-bearer, their chest protected by a close-ringed mail jerkin, by plate, wearing a mail coif and a kettle helmet, and armed with shield and *goedendag* each, dagger and sword at their leather belt.

When all the men had been gathered in the Friday Market, but the weavers unaware of how many more men waited in the streets, beside those that had emerged in the market, the drums silenced and a strange quietness came to hang over the marketplace.

John van de Velde cried over the crowd, to the intention of both forces, ‘friends, good *poorters* of Ghent, we have assembled here to restore order in Ghent. Ghent must rule itself, so that no single man or group of men can exert power over our good town. The count of Flanders rides to grab power in Ghent and revoke our charters. We cannot let this happen! I urge you all to follow me to the walls to defend our city!’.

The knight Ser John Damman, who stood in the second row of the *poorter*-knights, shouted back, ‘men of Ghent, free *poorters* of our good town, hear me out! Louis of Male is our rightful count. He has promised to respect our fundamental charters. We have to end the dominance of one group of *Gentenaars* over the other, indeed! We refuse the authority of the weavers, who govern our town since too many years already. We want our aldermen to be chosen by the townsmen and by the count, so that count and city can reconcile and work together in peace, as in the days of prosperity. We say to the dean of the weavers: drop your

arrogance, accept the change and wear allegiance to the rightful count of Flanders! Let the internal strives come to an end, let us reconcile with the count of Flanders!’

‘Death to the oppressors, to the liars and servants of the kings of France,’ shouted Geeraard Denijs. ‘You, Ser Damman, you stand next to the Leliaerts who are sold out to the enemies of Ghent.’

Geeraard Denijs snared a little later, ‘we, the weavers of Ghent, we shall defend our rights and our craft till the end! Nobody can take our dignity and our freedom from us. If our city is to be taken by force from us, we want no other burial place than the Friday Market! Lord, bless our strife for a just cause!’

At that moment, the bells of all the churches of Ghent began to sound. The clangour of the bells filled the Friday Market with ominous wooing. Geeraard Denijs stepped forward, out of the lines of the weavers, and he hit with his *goedendag* on the shield of a ghoulish-looking knight. Geeraard was so angry his fury hung as a veil over his eyes and mind. He had not realised what van de Velde knew already, that the forces of the counts, the fearful armoured knights seated on destriers plated with iron, waited no doubt somewhere in the town and could fall any moment upon the weavers with irresistible violence. Geeraard, as always, did not think. He attacked on his own. He twirled his weapon and shield. The knight in front of him at first refused to draw his sword, but when the blows of Denijs’ *goedendag* became insistent and dangerous, he shouted his war-cry ‘Flanders the Lion’, and drew his weapon, threw his shield at Denijs, and the two men engaged in a duel. Shouts were then heard from everywhere, out of thousands of throats, a frisson moved ran the ranks, and the two hordes of warriors clashed into one another. Armour clinked, feet thumped, trumpets clamoured, mail and iron plates clanked, the men howled, steel clashed against steel, swords swished forward.

The internecine battle among the weavers and the other guilds began immediately with ferocious rage. Swords swayed, *goedendags* stabbed, shields were thrown around, javelin flew over the men. The noise of the metal weapons on the embossed shields joined in with the shouts of ‘Flanders the Lion’ on the side of the knights and the fullers, and ‘Town and friends’ on the other. The weavers counted on their energy to make up for less power in people and arms. Another sound came soon to prevail in the Friday Market, the cries of the men who got wounded by the blows of axes, by long slices of swords, by thrusts of the *goedendags*. Blood flowed on the stones of the market square. Men were callously trampled upon, and died ignominiously, chests crushed. The terribly crude, rusted but very pointed *goedendags* passed beside and under the shields of the opponents and wounded painfully, tearing much blood. Axes pushed shields aside so that swords slashed in faces, which opened in ugly wounds. Breasts, arms and legs got covered in blood, and spears entered the soft underbellies of careless men who were not used to fighting and left their defence open for only a second.

The fullers had brought with them a few crossbowmen. These now let loose their bows, to have their bolts pierce the thickest armour and lodge far into soft breasts, often reaching the heart and lungs of the weavers. Many weavers who fought in the first rows were thus as by powerful hands thrown backwards, into the mass of their friends, killed instantaneously by long bolts of which the end part continued to protrude from their chest. Other men among the fullers held slings and shot small iron balls at the heads of the weavers. The weavers could only answer this disdainful tactic by ferociously assaulting these men they considered cowards, and hacking them down. The fullers closed in, however, and closed again their wall of shields. Then they pushed on and advanced.

The dean of the weavers, John van de Velde, fought courageously, protected by his shield. He wore a leather jerkin on which the silver-headed rivets secured iron plates between the cover of the leather and the fabric within. He wore a chain mail coif and a simple kettle helmet. John had trained with the sword, so he swung his weapon now with much dexterity. An enemy, coming near him was asking for a swift death. He advanced so much, the fullers in front of him receded, so that he came to stand between three men-at-arms of the adversary party. He realised too late he had advanced too far, too soon. He had been caught in a deadly trap. The warrior at his right side sliced with his sword through his thigh and his leg. John wore no greaves. Blood gurgled from out of the long wound, but John forced his leg to keep his body straight. The pain was excruciating, yet he fought on, parrying from the other men. The guildsman on his left pushed the long point of a *goedendag* deep in his side, and John realised such a wound was unforgiving. With total, last rage, he flung his sword forward and struck in a metal breastplate, but the stroke was too long, too weak. A mace struck against his helmet, smashed the metal into his brain. John van de Velde's eyes blackened, he lost consciousness, and fell to the ground. A hard foot came down on his chest and cracked his ribs, but John already did not feel pain anymore.

Geeraard Denijs fought a little farther. He wore a large breastplate and backplate, a coat of mail beneath, cuisses of steel plate riveted to hardened leather on his thighs and steel greaves on his calves. His shoulders and part of his arms were protected by steel rerebraces. He had remembered how ferocious a battle in the Friday Market could be, for he had fought at Bad Monday at exactly the same place. He remembered with dismay how on that day the fullers had stood exactly where the weavers fought now. The roles had been reversed! Now, the weavers stood with their back to the Leie! Would the weavers lose today's battle?

Geeraard had at first been flaying with the weight of his *goedendag*, waiting for the moment he could thrust the spear of his *goedendag* through the armour or mail of a knight. He bellowed orders to his guildsmen to close in, to form tight rows.

In front of Geeraard Denijs suddenly fought a man with lank hair, a powerful, tall fuller. Geeraard thought he recognised the man. He was sure he had seen him before in Ghent. This man fought, dressed only in a jerkin on which gilt-headed rivets secured metal plates between the wool cover and the leather back. He was holding a small, round shield. The fuller wore no helmet, but Geeraard surmised the man was also wearing a steel ring mail coat under his jerkin. The fuller was very agile, smart, alert, courageous, moving fast in dodging slashes of swords, and fending off axes by his *goedendag*. This man's *goedendag* had been well maintained, Geeraard thought. He had a meticulous man in front of him! The metal of the weapon shone white and the oil on the weight gleamed. The fuller nevertheless seemed an easy prey to Geeraard Denijs. He thrust the point of his *goedendag* forward, at a moment he thought the man had not been looking to his side. That had been a feint, however, for the fuller clashed suddenly his shield against Geeraard's weapon, deflecting it, and then Geeraard's body stood for only a fraction of a second open to weapons. The *goedendag* of the fuller rose from down below and caught under Geeraard's breastplate, entered his chest, piercing mail with great power, broke ribs, and tore higher up until the steel knife could no longer advance because the thick lump of steel beneath it reached skin. Geeraard gasped. The fuller withdrew his weapon, drawing gusts of blood. Geeraard bent double, still surprised at the speed with which he had been hit and deadly wounded.

'My name is Pieter Denout,' the fuller shouted into the face of Geeraard Denijs, 'and this is for my friend, James van Artevelde! May you burn in hell for eternity!'

Geeraard Denijs' eyes opened wide in surprise and horror. Why would someone shout to him on this day about James van Artevelde? Was this man the ghost of the van Artevelde he had

seen killed, laying at his feet in the *Paddenhoek*? Had Artevelde's spirit come to take revenge on him?

'And this for the fullers you killed on Bad Monday,' Pieter shouted again, a feral look in his eyes, bringing down the heavy weight of his *goedendag* on the head of Denijs.

A spurt of blood jetted over Pieter's head. Denijs fell hard on the ground, was sent sprawling on the cobbles. He hurt his head badly on the cobblestones, got dazed, and then two spears wielded by knights entered his breast. Blood spurted out from his multiple wounds. Geeraard understood his place of death would indeed be in the Friday Market. He accepted his fate with equanimity. His dark soul left him an instant later.

Pieter Denout had accomplished the work he had hoped for today, taking revenge for James van Artevelde and for his dead friends on Denijs, but as on Bad Monday, when James had saved him, he hated to kill fellow-citizens of Ghent. He withdrew, accompanied by his son Martin, who had fought next to him. They stepped slowly backwards, veered away, let the frantic knights and fullers and butchers trundle past him. Soon, they could not fight any longer because they stood in the mid of the fullers who pushed, shoulder to shoulder, to the front lines. The warriors swung, thrust and chopped with their *goedendags*.

Farther behind, the men had not yet reached the battle and were eager to do their share of the wounding and killing. The fullers bellowed, raw bloodlust, terror and revenge gleaming in their eyes. Pieter and Martin stopped and almost reached the rear armed guildsmen. Then, they ran home, fleeing from the fray, running through the streets of Ghent, the noise of the battle still in their ears, their gruesome work carried out. Pieter Denout had taken his revenge!

Under the pressure of superior numbers, the weavers were thrown back to the streets behind them, to the quays of the Leie on the other side of the river, over the Leie bridge to *Oudburg*. Tens of weavers lay on the stones, in their blood, felled by weapons. The battling fullers pushed forward and trampled on the corpses of dead and wounded guildsmen. The weavers had already lost the desire to win. They fought on with the fury of the desperate, but the luck of the victors hung not in the air on their side. They managed to wound and to kill as many fullers as they lost men, but where they stabbed with one sword, two swords lunged back at them from the opposite side. A very tall, powerful fuller swayed a sword around, killing three weavers who stood in his way. That man too was finally heavily wounded by the spear of a lean weaver. The man staggered back, but he was instantly replaced by a butcher and a fuller come to take vengeance for him.

The weavers held the bridge to *Oudburg* and the quays for a long time. They still fought the fullers in the Friday Market. More men pushed them backwards from the side streets. The weavers stood densely packed in the *Lange Munt*, the long street that led from the *kuipe* to the square. They had almost been driven out of the Friday Market, but still they fought. They heard another frightening sound. A thick pack of horsemen, fully armoured knights, entirely covered in steel and wearing over that steel a tunic with the black lion on the yellow background of the colours of Flanders, rode with great force into them, seated on heavy destriers, equally plated with iron. The knights had erupted suddenly, visors closed, lances couched. They charged, determined to clean the path in front of them. They held their long lances horizontal. They transpierced the weavers who confronted them. The war-horses snapped their teeth. The coursers pranced, lashing out with their hoofs. The heavier destriers crushed the weavers under their hoofs. The riders smashed into the weavers. Their charge did not flounder. Already, the knights let their lances loose, the lances remained where they had struck. The knights grabbed their war-maces and hit heads and breasts. To avoid the massacre,

weavers jumped into the Leie. Those who could not thus escape, were crushed under the iron hooves of the war-horses. The armoured knights sheared through the tangle of fighting men. In a few minutes' time, the *Lange Munt* had been cleared of weavers and the knights rode forward to the bridge over the Leie. Only dead bodies lay in the path of the count's riders. 'Flanders the Lion' was still shouted, by these men too; the weavers did not shout back. They fled now, to save their lives. The fleeing weavers were harried by the men-at-arms on horseback. The knights goaded their mounts on. The bridge too was cleared in a matter of seconds, so that the remaining weavers who still fought in the Friday Market, saw no escape possible. They were massacred in the square. The other weavers fled via *Oudburg*. They formed no organised resistance anymore to the knights, and soon the fullers too emerged from the Friday Market, in their pursuit. There, the weavers were killed in great numbers. More wounded weavers were inexorably pushed into the Leie. The Leie coloured red with Ghentish blood.

The mass of metal-clad men, either on horseback or on foot, continued to shatter their enemy. They succeeded in passing the bridge, in riding in the broader *Oudburg*, on the quays, and they slaughtered weavers. The weavers had formed there small groups of men who were so horrified by then they did not even try anymore to defend their lives. They formed nothing more but an inert rabble.

A strong voice from among the horse riders then called, 'hold off! Stop the fight, men! We have won! The fight is over! No need to slay everybody. We won the day! Let our opponents escape, now. Hold off! Stop the fight! Weavers, throw down your weapons and go home!' The lord who shouted was the lord van de Walle, the war-lord and friend of the count. Van de Walle angrily stopped swords from hacking on, axes from yet tearing through spines, spears from piercing through soft flesh. The fullers stopped where they stood, killed the last wounded weavers under their feet. They lowered their weapons to their new leader, and then cried out their victory, arms and weapons held high. A few hundred weavers lay dead on the stones from the bridge to the Friday Market. Many more weavers, on the other side of the Leie, running toward the *Grauwpoort* and the newly-built *Groenen Briel* abbey, escaped, throwing down shields and *goedendags*. Tens of bodies floated in the red river. Some men splashed still in the water, but all wore steel. The river sucked them in, inexorably drawing them to the bottom, into the mud of ages that was to be their tomb.

The fullers of Ghent soon called that day of the thirteenth of January of 1349 by the name of 'Goede Disendach', of Good Tuesday, after the previous battle of Bad Monday, in which the weavers had slain the fullers in the same way. Good Tuesday marked the revenge of the fullers in Ghent.

A little later, when silence and quietness had been gained in Ghent, when the shouts had ceased, when the fullers were gathering the weapons of the fallen weavers, and when the monks and the women of Ghent sought for their wounded and dead, which had been left in the market square and in the streets leading to the battlefield, a very colourful group of horse riders passed the Friday Market. The riders looked with contempt at the dead bodies. One rider rode in black and yellow colours. His breastplate gleamed like silver in the last light of the afternoon. The reddening, bleak sun of the winter day threw her last scarlet rays on the yellow badge embroidered on his silk tunic. He rode in full armour, a long mail coat over which he wore his breast- and backplates of polished and engraved steel, strips of steel fixed on a leather skirt. Espaliers covered his shoulders and his arms were protected by vambraces and rerebraces. His legs were protected by cuisses, by greaves down below and by roundels over his knees. His feet stood in boots of scale of overlapping steel. His horse also was

covered with armour, and the huge, black animal was caparisoned in a great, yellow cloth on which was embroidered the black lion of Flanders. That lion also stood on the badge of the knight's surcoat. The horse blew out warm breath. It was tired, it had galloped a long time. When the rider arrived at the bridge that could bring him to the *Gravensteen*, he opened his pig-snouted visor so that one could distinguish the heavy coif of steel that hung around his cheeks. His helmet was decorated with silver motives of lions. The face he showed to the few knights, fullers and butchers who still lingered in groups near the bridge over the Leie, was very young.

He was the absolute victor of the day, the man to whom this day all power of Flanders had come, Louis of Male, young count of Flanders. Louis had been in the town of Aalst, when a messenger had brought him the news his knights and the fullers of Ghent were winning a terrible battle. He had come immediately to his good and wealthy city. Louis of Male now rode on with the knights of his court to the *Gravensteen*, followed by a strong garrison of additional troops. Louis reflected astutely that he had realised something his father could only have dreamed off! In less than one year, he had subdued all the cities of Flanders to his will.

\*\*\*\*\*

Two days later, this same rider, not dressed in heavy armour, only covered by a light leather jerkin, in leather trousers and seated on a fast, brown horse, accompanied by only five guards wearing no banners, rode out of the sombre *Gravensteen*. He rode north on the road to Axel, to Beostenblijje. He had sent a messenger the day before, to notify his love, Heyla de Smet, of his imminent venue.

Heyla, now the noble and wealthy lady of Beostenblijje, spent that morning dressing up to receive her lover. She had coiled her blond hair into thick tresses, and then tugged them into ram's horns, placed on her head, which also capped her ears, so that she looked taller and statelier. Her bodice came to high around her neck. It was immaculate white, deep and open on her magnificent breasts, which were enhanced in volume by the light red gown that fell from just below her bosom to her shoes. The wool of her dress was thick and soft, felted, and since it was the heart of winter, her sleeves were stuffed with furs. Furs also hung at the ends. Her shoes were dark green, closed by golden buckles. Her red robe was edged with ermine furs. Heyla wore a necklace that sparkled with its precious stones, white and green, the colour of her eyes. On her chest hung a brooch of large green emeralds, the first present Louis of Male had offered her. The brooch was to ask from Louis of Male, 'do you still love me as on the first day?' and its aim was to remember him of his oaths of fidelity. Although she had given birth and was pregnant again, she shone her beauty gorgeously; a queen would have been jealous of her figure.

Louis of Male's horse rode with clattering hooves in the yard of Heyla's manor. She ran downstairs and flew into Louis's arms. The victor had arrived to fetch his prize. Heyla played for the rest of the day the perfect housewife, the lady of the manor. Only after they had been laying, totally spent, in bed, and ordered a late, light supper, sitting at the table in a small room, did Heyla begin with what another messenger, a guard sent by the Pharaïldis men of Ghent, had brought her in a long letter written by Gillis Vresele.

'You have won the cities, a splendid victory, three victories over Bruges, Ieper and Ghent. You leniently promised clemency to the people in the cities. Your clemency was not worth much, though, for you massacred and banished hundreds of people in each town. You publicly strung up seven influential men in the market place of Ieper, killed tens of guildsmen

in Bruges, and banished more. Tell me, Louis, am I the lover of a dangerous, bloodthirsty man who takes bloody revenge on the *poorters* of the cities? How many men are you going to kill in Ghent, how many will be banished, how many imprisoned and hung? Is it your intent to punish my family and friends?’

‘Heyla, don’t start a row,’ Louis exclaimed, irritated. ‘Margaret shouts at me for days in a row like a fury, on anything. Don’t you do that to me too! And not today!’

‘Is it true then, your word is not worth a florin? Are your promises but idle words? Do you promise to spare and then you strike and kill?’

‘Darling, Heyla, this is complex! Let me explain how I feel! I am trying so much to keep balance among so very many men, tendencies and dire situations. It sometimes happens I don’t know anymore on which leg I am standing and I often wonder whether I still have a leg to stand on! Don’t you please add to it!

On the one side, there are the knights of the cities, all of ancient, wonderful, Christian and pious families. They want me to take power, but only to give it back to them immediately, so that they can again do what they want in the cities, rife in much money and grow rich on the backs of the other *poorters*.

Then there are my good lords of the castellanies, powerful, wealthy men all, who don’t like at all the arrogant knights of the cities. They would like my bailiffs of the towns to arrest and disarm the *poorter*-knights, keep half of them in jail and have the other half banished from the towns so that their own power over the cities would be re-installed.

The weavers and the cloth merchants want to wield power in the cities. They claim they don’t trust the knights in their cities, because the landowner-knights of the good, respectable families steal all the tax money for their own amusement. The weavers also dislike the lords of the castellanies because these lords would like to get rich from the sale of cloth woven with the same quality as in the cities. Quality cloth has remained the privilege of the larger cities, so the smaller cities conspire with the lords of the castellanies. The weavers hang around me every day with the same song: give us a charter to weave quality cloth so that we can compete with Ghent. The weavers and the traders in the towns believe they should manage the towns and not the knights, for they are a lot smarter, which may well be true.

The fullers and the smaller guilds distrust the weavers. The fullers would like to earn much more for their work. They claim the weavers and the cloth merchants are bloodsuckers, oppressors. They hate the weavers.’

Louis stopped, let his words sink in. He sighed, but continued explaining.

‘Dear Heyla, there are many more conflicts brewing everywhere in Flanders. My people are of the distrustful, quarrelling kind and I stand among them. When you put two Flemings together, they start quarrelling, and when you intervene, they both hit your head! Believe me, have pity for me, but I must grant something to the ones and something else to the others and offend no one. When somebody wins, this somebody seeks revenge for humiliation, offences and deaths and much money lost in the past, and this somebody also seeks to reassert his power by crushing everybody else. The world and people of Flanders have been made that way by God, and they are in this unlike any other, I fear. Maybe they are very intelligent men and the conflicts with everybody else around them comes with the intelligence. Whatever, quarrelling with everybody is their nature.

I, poor Louis, stand in the middle of all that. It is as if I hear arrows whistling around my head, coming from all sides at the time. I am a powerful count, but I have no army of my own. I rely on the army of the knights and on the militia of some cities. I can handle one lord by using the men-at-arms from the others, but when they unite I am dead.

Now, amongst all this, the lords of my county swear by one very simple rule: when you revolt against me, I shall seek to crush you and when I win, I will kill you and dominate and have peace for some time. If I, Louis of Male, refuse some revenge to the knights, the knights will rise and rebel against me and dress their considerable armies against me. Why, one of the manors they might attack first could be my beloved manor of Beostenblijje!

Louis stopped speaking for a moment, noticing fear and apprehension in Heyla's eyes. He was satisfied. Heyla had listened and understood. He continued his tirade.

'The militia of the cities are disorganised at the moment. The men of the militia have even fought against one another, with very many dead men as a result. How could they then fight together into one battalion? I must keep the guilds apart, or the fullers may kill the weavers while on campaign, or vice versa. Therefore, I have no choice left but to use the men-at-arms of the knights to bring about some form of peace. And so too, I must satisfy their lusts for revenge. They have lost much, you know, many of them have been banished from their lands for tens of years, forced to this by the treaties demanded by the cities. You should have seen the lists the knights of my court presented to me of people they want killed or banished for tens of years! I have shortened those lists to one-fourth or one-fifth of the names, but I must give something to the lords! I cannot go entirely against the mores of the moment, for then everybody will fight me, as they did to my father.

The Leliaert knights may well ride to Paris and complain to the king of France. My knights may refuse to fight for me, as they have done before, and the cities may be depleted of men because everybody there killed everybody and hates the rest.

So, dear Heyla, what have I done? I gave my knights and lords of the castellanies a small bone to chew upon. I tell you, I was not in Bruges when my knights began to hack in on the weavers, despite my wishes, and I was also not present at Ieper when the same happened there. Just before I arrived at Ghent, the fullers were very agreeably killing all the weavers in town. Luckily, the lord van de Walle stopped them in time.

My dear, dear Heyla, I am young, too young, my court does not take me entirely serious, and I have to survive amidst all that violence! My head spins of the balancing acts I must perform each day to keep me and you safe! I am not the count, I am a juggler, the jester of the court. I try to do what I can, tell the Pharaïldis men that for me, for I am sure they set you up to scorn me, too. They shall be safe, Heyla, tell them that. Some other lives will be lost, that is not to be avoided! I am not after feckless policies! Don't scorn me too, Heyla, please, not you! If ever there can be peace in Flanders, then I too cannot but admit that a simple rule everyone understands must be applied.'

Louis made pleading eyes to Heyla, which she could never resist, so she placed a hand on his face, caressed, and told him to go on.

'This rule governs my land: if you revolt, whoever you are, make sure you win, but I will make sure you don't win and then, "Vae Victis!" I shall throw the sword in the balance scales. Since you know the rule, rebels, whether you are knight or commoner or *poorter*, don't revolt and have some fear for me.

I must rule, Heyla, so I must show I can wield power to the cities and to the lords of the castellanies. I must show to them a least a little what they may expect when they revolt. They have forgotten the simple rule of their count for tens of years. Like children, I have to teach them! That should keep them quiet for some time. Then, when the cities are quiet, Heyla, I can use their militias to prove to my knights I too am powerful, and then the knights of the castellanies and the knights of the cities will remain quite too, otherwise I may throw the militia of the cities at them. Do you understand? I am not there yet, and some banging of heads is direly needed in Flanders.

Then, and only then peace will reign. I will be able to reign. I may even be loved. I am not there yet, Heyla! So, I have to give a little here, and take a little there. I must try being the stupid, innocent young guy who does this and that, ostentatiously aimless. That gives me time to grow, in years and in power. Give me time, Heyla, ask the Pharaïldis men to bear with me. You have no idea how vengeful everybody really is in Flanders! These men have been used to so much conflicts and battles and fighting, for so many tens of years, they wouldn't know how to live differently. When the time of the full power of the count comes, the times of peace will arrive. Maybe they will never come, but I sure must to my best to make it happen. I despair often, Heyla! In the meantime, I have to give a little and take a little, even when that little are the heads of a few tens of people, but they knew what to expect when defeated.' Heyla asked, 'what do you want us to do?'

'The Pharaïldis men are pragmatic and progressive, Heyla. They must understand how pragmatically and realistically I must handle the conflicts. The progress they expect of me cannot be as quick as they might think. I will get there, but at my own pace. Otherwise, I fear Flanders entire will reject me. I cannot sail as quickly as a cog on the ocean, and change directions in contrary winds is as difficult for a sea-going cog as it is for me. A sea-cog has it often difficult to enter a harbour. I have not yet arrived in a quite safe harbour, Heyla, and I am fighting as well for me as for you. One day, one day, Heyla, the lords of the castellanies and my knights will remark with consternation that it is not they anymore who command, but I. In the meantime, I am to be the jester of the court, the young, innocent boy who is married to a grumpy, pious, much older hag, and who therefore sleeps with another, most beautiful and kind, soft, no doubt half-witted girl. Which you are not.

So, Heyla, how do I support all this? Only because I know that there is one place on earth I can have peace and love in. Don't take that away from me, please, Heyla, my love! So what do we do, Heyla?'

Heyla de Smet, lady of Beoostenblijje, thought a while, holding her head a little obliquely. She straightened the creases in her elaborate dress. She sighed.

Then, she put a finger at her pouted lips, made her finest, longing eyes, and said, 'back to bed, my dear, dear poor Louis! To bed!'

She drew her to him, and he buried his head to her ample breast. Then, they both laughed, kissed, and Heyla drew him, flowing weightlessly, to the other room.

\*\*\*\*\*

The day after Goede Disendach already, the new rulers of Ghent disarmed the weavers' guild. In the following weeks and months, the government of Ghent was drastically modified. Lievin van Veurne, the first alderman of the Keure was deposed. A little later, all the aldermen were dismissed, and new aldermen installed. The old families of landowner-poorters and knights came back to power. The ancient names were to be found on the second group of twenty-six aldermen of the year 1348 to 1349, until August of 1349: Henry de Grutere, Gerolf Bette, Jan Damman, Solomon Borluut, James Rijnvisch, John van Wiendeke, Gillis Soyssone, John Utenberge and Daniel de Tolleneere among them. Some of the new aldermen were even people who had been banished by James van Artevelde, ten years earlier.

One hundred and fifty influential weavers and cloth merchants were still imprisoned in Ghent. Among these were the two sons of James van Artevelde, John and James the Younger, with their uncle William van Artevelde. William had been alderman of Ghent in 1347! They were banished from the town. King Edward III took the van Arteveldes under his protection. They remained in England for several years, then returned to Ghent, after Louis of Male had granted his grace to many weavers.

The former ways of choosing the aldermen of the town, by four men of the count and four men of the former aldermen, was re-instored.

The weavers were punished severely. They lost their dean and were not allowed to assign a new one. The aldermen designated a manager, a director, a *beleeder* for the guild. The taxes on the weavers from before 1338 were newly ordered. The weavers had again to pay to take on apprentices, and pay to be allowed to exercise their craft. Each weaver who had work, was obliged to pay a weekly tax to be able to continue exercising his craft! The weavers were excluded from the government of Ghent. They were not allowed anymore to organise meetings of the members of their guild, and also not to gather in groups of more than three men. Any poorter of Ghent who found more than three weavers together, talking and conferring, could go to the group and order the men to give him their tunics. The weavers were also not allowed to change crafts, which some of them had tried to do, escaping from the harsh taxes imposed on them.

Many weavers were banished, and the remaining ones were forbidden to leave town. Too many weavers found the new rules too harsh and began to flee to England, to settle there and to weave there under the protection of the king of England.

The new aldermen forced a loan on the most prominent opposers of the count. About two hundred and fifty men and women were thus fined for their sympathy for the regime of James van Artevelde, among whom foremost Catherine de Coster, the widow of James van Artevelde. She had to contribute the largest amount to the city loan. Additionally, she was forced to pay sixty pounds groot her husband had supposedly taken from the city treasury. The sons of James van Artevelde had to pay the blood price the aldermen of the city had paid a few years earlier for the death of Fulk Uten Rosen, killed by James van Artevelde. Also the van Lens family, the family of Gelnoot van Lens, the most faithful captain of Ghent under James van Artevelde, was heavily fined.

Catherine de Coster was not banished. She remained in Ghent and married the knight Zeger de Bornaige, a man of the count of Flanders.

The name of *Goede Disendach*, of Good Tuesday, stuck in the minds of the people of Ghent as the victory of the fullers and of the city knights. The new aldermen of Ghent installed a yearly feast to commemorate the victory of the old lineages. This feast was organised each year for at least the next ten years.

In the spring of 1349, another great disaster struck Ghent, making everybody forget for a while who was in power and who not.

## The Scourge

The horrendous pestilence had already ravaged France and England. It did not spare Flanders, contrary to what many had hoped, even though it arrived late, only after the winter of from 1348 to 1349. It seemed to us it had rested during the winter, deceiving us, and then assaulted us with renewed force in spring. It had not yet reached Ghent when the battle of Good Tuesday raged, but Count Louis of Male was well aware of the fact he had little time left to consolidate his power. The count received barely two entire months of respite to push through the most important of his reforms in the government of Bruges, Ghent and Ieper. He knew he

would have to drop back in the shadows of his castle of Male soon afterwards, and hope that while the sickness raged nobody would contest his authority.

By April of 1349, I, Jehan Terhagen, had settled since several weeks with my guests in my castle of New Terhagen. I had with me the monk Evrard Vresele, twenty-eight years old, who sang his masses in my small chapel. Boudin Vresele of the Vresele family had also arrived. Boudin was thirty-two. Four young girls brought joy to our days: the sixteen-year old Avezoete van Lake and the seventeen-year old Alise van Lake, Wivine and Quintine Denout. Two young men completed the members of the Pharaïldis family, Martin Denout of eighteen and Clais de Hert of sixteen. Our youngest was Boudin van Lake, who was eight. Counting our guard Ywen de Wilde, who was thirty-five, and his wife Kateline Dankers of thirty, plus their two sons Ruebin and Kerstiaen of four and five, we were four adult men, four young girls, one woman, two young men and three children.

Raes van Lake the Younger had promised me two more guards. He kept his word. He sent me two former mercenaries, who told me they were called Everdey de Handscoemakere and Mathis van Noortkerke. Everdey came with his wife Marie and a young son and daughter of six and five. Mathis also was married and brought his wife Anna, who was pregnant, with two sons, one of three years old and one of two. In total then, we were finally six adult men, two younger men, three women, four young women, and eight children. We had a lot of mouths to feed, but we were well-to-do.

The three women Kateline, Marie and Anna cooked, washed, cleaned, did our laundry, and bathed the children. I explained to everybody in that midst of winter, what we might expect. Our aim was to survive the sickness. Our two wells would be well used for the washing and bathing, but in the beginning we also used our moat, since the river flowed there. Everybody was to use the latrines. The guards Ywen, Everdey and Mathis agreed readily with what I said. They did not believe me stupid or telling them an impossible story. They understood why they were at Terhagen, and they proved grateful for having been allowed to hide with us.

Everdey de Handscoemakere had never made any gloves, though his name indicated so, and he never wore any either. He was a short man with a beginning paunch because he loved beer and wine. He was thirty years old. He was a nice man, more often than not in very good humour. I would soon find out that although he was a heavy man, he could be remarkably fast with the sword, and deploy extraordinary energy.

Mathis van Noortkerke was in almost everything the contrary of Everdey, a tall, lean man, extremely muscled but with muscles of the wiry kind. He loomed more than a head taller than Everdey, and twice as thin. He too wore a sword when I first met him, but he came to Terhagen with a heavy morningstar in his hands. He confessed maces and morningstars were his preferred weapons. The very long, broad sword he wore he had only put on for the show, he claimed. Mathis was of a morose character, but the children flocked to him. He was very kind, patient, helpful and friendly with children, always ready to invent a new game for them. He was twenty-five, but he looked a keenly intelligent man to me, very present in all he did. His face was much scarred and pockmarked, but that did not scare the children away from him. He was so ugly in the face, our Mathis, I always wondered how Anna de Cleyne had ever wanted to marry such a man. She must have detected his kind soul. Mathis cherished his wife.

The first day Everdey and Mathis arrived at New Terhagen, I tested them on their skill with weapons. I made them fight me with the sword. I was rather proud of my own skills in sword-

fighting. Everdey needed five slashes before he disarmed me. He flung my sword three paces into the grass of my yard. That left me a little open-mouthed and embarrassed, with red cheeks.

Mathis grumbled he didn't like parrying swords, and he too fought with his sword, but the first time he hit my blade, my sword vibrated so much from the clash I hurt my hand and I had to drop my weapon. I grinned, shook my painful right hand, and went to weigh his weapon. I found it incredibly heavy, two or three times the weight of my blade. I whistled and looked at the men with other eyes. They had proven their point. I would never again engage them in a duel.

A little later, I handed them two crossbows, made them stand against the wall of my manor house and asked them to shoot into the wood of one of the posts of the main gate, a distance of more than fifty paces. They asked me back where in the post I wanted the bolts, and I pointed to the place where the horizontal beam met the vertical one. They had never used or even seen my crossbows. They studied, weighed the weapons, tried the bow, then loaded the bolts, cranked the bow, aimed, and then they put both bolts at less than an inch from where I had wanted them. They looked displeased with the inch, but I did not want to try to demonstrate my own skills this time, which I nevertheless considered particularly well. I refrained from a third test. They had proven to be consummate masters! Compared by them I was merely a callow youth.

We had not much to do at castle Terhagen, so I ordered everybody to train each day, men, women and young women. The three guards Ywen, Everdey and Mathis taught how to fight with the sword, the mace and the *goedendag*, as well as with crossbows. They also taught a few dirty tricks of fist-fighting and of the nastiest street-fighting. I appreciated they were never scurrilous or rumbustious with the women. They were better educated than I had expected. They treated the girls thoughtfully and politely. The girls giggled a lot, of course, but our mercenaries were more embarrassed than they.

We settled in a strict routine of baths. One day the men washed in a room, one by one, then the women, the young women, the children, and then we started anew. The women cleaned the floors more often than they were used to, but didn't protest, after I had explained them why, even though my arguments were weak. I too didn't know what cleaning might be good for. We lacked straw, so we did not place any on the floors, but we refrained from throwing our fish-bones and meat-bones on the floors of the castle.

During the winter, even in the months of February and March, and still into early April, I continued my tours in the countryside around Axel and along the Scheldt. I still bought land I considered interesting for agriculture. I inspected my farms. I explained to my steward and partner Geert van Dorp, what was to be expected from the sickness, and I told the same to Lauwers Christiaens, the brick-maker, and to Lammin Metsers, the mason. I invited them to come to live either at Old or New Terhagen as soon as danger loomed. At that time, they preferred to remain near Axel. Lauwers owned a farm in the countryside. He told he might hide there during the sickness, but I saw he did not really believe me when I talked about the devastating effects of the pestilence.

My real worry during the winter was about an entirely different development.

I remarked first how Martin Denout, the fuller's son, eyed Avezoete van Lake, the weaver's daughter. When their glances clashed, their eyes gleamed, and Avezoete smiled with that knowing glimpse all girls exercise in to attract boys. The first time I saw them laugh together and rub shoulders, I shook my head. I had thought of protecting the Denouts and the van Lakes, not of having to see to it that Avezoete didn't return to her father with a belly thrice its

usual size! I would have to keep a close watch on those two and preach a sermon on chastity to Martin!

A little later, young Clais de Hert seemed particularly helpful to Avezoete's sister Alise, and that surprised me equally, for Alise was a stern girl, older also than Clais. When Alise went to fetch milk on the farm, Clais offered to accompany her, and she allowed him at her side. Alise went for the milk, but Clais came back with the bucket and with Alise.

I pondered anxiously my castle would soon be called by the name of Love Terhagen! Involvement with a girl was not what I had sought until then, I was rather shy with girls, but I had to admit Quintine and Wivine Denout, both eighteen, were girls entirely to my taste! I liked the better the sincere, fine, elegant, loving Quintine, but when the lustier Wivine began to wave her hips at me, and flapping her eyelashes, challenging me with words and furtive touches of her body, I realised I was utterly at a loss on how to cope. Wivine was very adept at wriggling her alluring curves, promising uninhibited enjoyment of carnal pleasures as yet unknown to me. I blushed like a boy of ten, and ran away, back to the house or out of the room I was in with her. Ywen, Everdey and Mathis noticed these scenes of course, for we had little privacy at New Terhagen, and that irritated me, for my authority sank with every grin they showed me, looking first at me and then at Wivine.

We heard from the slow progress of the pestilence towards Ghent from Clais de Hert. Clais and Martin Denout rode to Ghent every odd week. Clais talked to his father and grandfather, the shippers de Hert. These still navigated on the Scheldt and the Leie, southwards. From the beginning of March on they told Clais cases of the pestilence had appeared in the French-speaking cities on those rivers, and then more northerly. They estimated the first sick to succumb in the beginning of April in Ghent. I did not expect the illness at Axel and environs before May or even June. As those months crept near, we tensed. I forbade Clais and Martin to travel to Ghent. I stopped my travels in the countryside of the Four Crafts. Everybody in the castle and in our farm knew what to expect, Evrard had explained what he had learned from Gerolf, and I also warned Mother Amalberga of the convent of Ter Hage, as well as the aldermen of Axel.

My castle was a little crowded. My dream of a haven of peace and quiet was constantly disturbed by the shouts and the quarrels of the children. Chaste Terhagen, New Terhagen, Cat Terhagen, Happy Terhagen, Love Terhagen, Clean Terhagen, were but the many names indicating a lively, hospitable, curious, happy community within my walls. I was proud to have so many people enjoying themselves and benefitting from my dream, even if at times I found the crowd too invasive of my privacy. When the noise became too much for me, I rode out, allowing only me to do so. As long as the pestilence had not reached the Four Crafts and the lower Scheldt, I rode out in the low lands I had come to love so much, and I continued to bring in rare victuals, vegetables usually. I continued the buying of land.

I also often visited Beostenblijje, where Heyla de Smet lived with her family. I found John de Smet and his wife Marie Vresele there, with their son Wouter the Younger. John had set up an improvised workshop at Beostenblijje, and Heyla seemed pleased to have a goldsmith who was also a blacksmith in her manor. Around that time, Lammin Metsers finished the last work at her property, dismissing then many of his workers.

Count Louis of Male visited Heyla once every while, but I only met the count once there. He had left a permanent garrison of five young guards at Beostenblijje. They lived in a series of low, thatched houses Lammin built in a row at some distance of Heyla's manor.

\*\*\*\*\*

The pestilence reached the suburbs of Ghent at the beginning of April. Very quickly then the wave of the sickness engulfed the largest city of Flanders. The first victims appeared in the suburb of Saint Peter's, then around the quays of *Tussen Bruggen*, but the sickness spread at amazing speed once it had reached the houses and the crowded streets. Within a timespan of two weeks, sick men and women lay in all the hospitals of Ghent. I heard of the great distress in our hometown from Heyla, for Heyla lived closest to the bay of Axel and John de Hert brought his ship regularly there to give us news of how far the pestilence had advanced and how bad the situation was. He spoke to Heyla without leaving his boat, and he also refused allowing his assistants on land. He told us to expect the pestilence in Axel in mid-May. He stressed the arrival of the sickness was unavoidable.

In Ghent, the pestilence came violently, harshly and totally. We knew the symptoms by then. People started coughing, felt weak, then feverish, and had to lie down. Soon, the same day, swellings appeared in armpits or groins or both, and one day later, these blackened and were painful. When pierced, dried blood and pus broke out of the wounds. The person was by then too weak to stand. As family members might be too scared to help the sick, the man or woman remained lying in his or her excrements and urine. The sick were unable to help themselves. The stronger and not too sick could be brought to the hospitals, which filled up rapidly. The good nuns of the convents of Ghent took in everybody who knocked at their doors, and they cared for the sick. They could only keep the people who were ill relatively clean, separate the ones who they thought might recover from the ones they were sure would not survive. They kept separate rooms for the sick that suffocated rapidly, and died atrociously within the day. The nuns were soon overwhelmed by the misery they saw, and depressed when so few outlived their sickness. The nuns had not enough beds for so many afflicted, so they placed thick straw on their cold floors, opened large parts of their rooms, halls and churches, and placed the sick next to each other on the bare stones.

The monks who had no hospital of their own, helped the nuns in transporting on and off the sick and the dead. The monks also buried the dead, helped by a few journey men who did not catch the sickness or had survived from it. They could soon not bury men and women individually anymore, so they dug out large pits, tossed the bodies from the boards in the pits, covered the bodies with lime, and closed the pits with layers of earth. New burial grounds had to be consecrated.

Sick people lay in May of 1349 in almost every house of Ghent, and rare were the houses in which somebody had not died yet. It became obvious that less dead were to be mourned in the *stenen*, in the houses of stone, less than in the wattle-and-daub and thatched houses, but many of the wealthier and landowner-*poorters* had fled from Ghent by mid-April.

Gerolf Vresele, the kind Franciscan, the Fremineuren monk, the intelligent, courageous, erudite, well-travelled, very wise Gerolf, had not stayed hidden inside his abbey. He had early on moved to the Bijloke convent, where the Reverend Mother Abbess, who knew him very well, was glad to have him at her side. She asked him to organise the tasks the women, the nuns, could not do. He and volunteers moved the sick on stretchers, and disposed of the corpses of the deceased to the burial ground.

Gerolf worked until he fell, from morning to deep in the night. The abbess scolded him for wasting his strength. She was right. By mid-May, right after he had found the means and the people to organise the picking up of sick people lying in the streets around the convent, he started coughing badly. He told the abbess he had caught a cold, but she did something she had rarely done to men: she placed her cold hand on Gerolf's front, and felt the sweat and heat of fever. She did not say a word, but she forced Gerolf to come with her to a separate room, a nun's cell, where she told him to lie down a while. Gerolf passed away peacefully three days

later, his head in the arms of the abbess, who lost a dear friend. The last Gerolf remembered with delight was the touch of the lips of the Mother Abbess on his front. The abbess died but two weeks later.

In the house of the Vresele family in the *Kalanderberg*, lived then only Gillis Vresele with his wife Avezoete, and their servants. Of the four family servants, two women and two men, only one survived. The sickness felled Avezoete's maid like the others, but the woman survived. This was seen as a sign of hope. Gillis Vresele never got sick, but Avezoete Wulslager succumbed after merely one day. She got sick with the rapid form of the pestilence. Gillis Vresele cared for her, comforted her when she wept and was in pain, and then buried her with his own hands in the churchyard of Saint John's, where he had secured and defended a patch of holy ground large enough only for one person. Avezoete Wulslager got also a holy mass, but the ceremony only lasted a short quarter of an hour, and there was only one priest left to say a few words in church and at the grave.

The mourning bells of Ghent still sounded over the city then, all morning, but the bells soon became too sad to hear for the people of the city, so the chiming stopped. Nuns, priests and monks died in large numbers, so that in some hospitals only a few nuns and doctors remained nursing, with so few assistants who had survived, that the service to the sick practically broke down to almost no care. It was not better from then on to go to a hospital than to die in one's own house.

In the de Smet family of the *Veldstraat*, Wouter, the patriarch, had died recently. Blissfully, he had passed away not due to the pestilence from which he would have suffered much, but by dying in his sleep at the end of the year of 1348, at the ripe age of sixty-eight years. His wife, Lijsbetten, was terraced by the pestilence in the Bijloke convent, where she was helping the nuns. She died after three days of excruciating agony, coughing and sweating blood, merely lying on a heap of straw, very cold at the back, trembling and tossing, feeling rats at night scuffle around her feet. Luckily, Veerle, her daughter, was at the van Lake house with her husband William, caring for the sick too, but unaware to where her mother had gone. A messenger of the Bijloke announced Veerle her mother's death. When Veerle hurried to the convent, her mother had already been thrown in a common pit and the pit closed. A nun showed Veerle approximately where her mother had been buried. Veerle fell on her knees there and wept, cried, embraced the earth, for she had seen many dead but still could not comprehend her indestructible mother had finally surrendered. The family of Lijsbetten Mutaert's son had fled to Beoostenblijde, so Lijsbetten had died in the hope John de Smet had been saved. The fine goldsmith's house in the *Veldstraat* stood empty.

Before he left Ghent, John had hidden with the help of his father all the gold, silver and precious stones he could not take with him. He had hidden them in holes in the walls of his cellar and then closed the holes with bricks and mortar. This treasure was not found when thieves pillaged the house, but all the silver platters, crockery, vases, candelabra's, tapestries, that stood on display in the rooms, were stolen within two days. Even some of the furniture, fine chairs and chests, had been brought out of the workshop and carried off in carts.

The house that was most racked by the pestilence was the house of the van Lake family, even though the van Lakes caught the illness only in June, at a moment they thought they had escaped from the ordeal. The daughters of the sons of the house, Alise and Avezoete, had been sent with Raes the Younger's son of nine, Boudin, to the castle of Terhagen. They were safe there, but when the pestilence crept in at the peak of its power of doing harm, within two days all the inhabitants of the *Brabantstraat* complex of the van Lakes got infected. From the

virulent disease that harassed the van Lakes of Ghent, one died or the sickness passed you by. Being cared for in hospitals changed nothing to that simple truth.

Zwane Bentijn, the wife of the patriarch Raes the Elder, was the first to feel she was not well. She did not cough, developed no fever, but when the first swellings appeared in her armpits they covered her arms in one night. Both her arms black, she was suddenly violently sick, vomited blood and cried out in horror and pain. Zwane had been a coquettish woman, always well-dressed and careful with her face, her hands and legs, elaborately making up her hair. The sickness meant total horror for her, everything she had abhorred throughout her life ravaged her body in one night. Raes the Elder could not give her hope, and in the last hours of his wife, he too sank in pains to his bed, wanted to die next to his dying wife. Zwane died first, happily unconscious of what was happening to her. Raes the Elder passed away more quietly a day later, after a quicker illness than the one of his wife. He had the presence of mind to remark his two daughters-in-law, who had cared for Zwane and for him, had also started coughing and looking red in the face. Raes had never cried tears in his life. Now, he closed his eyes when the pearls rolled over his cheeks. Zwane and Raes the Elder were barely buried together in the same tomb, when Veerle de Smet and Mechtild van Lens had to lie down with fever. The symptoms of the pestilence were on them.

The servants of the van Lakes had fled by then from the house, more than half of them had died after three days. The kind of sickness that touched the van Lake houses with their evil proved very virulent. When Mechtild and Veerle lay sick in bed, Raes the Younger and William cared for their loved ones. A few days later, they buried their family. They buried their wives.

Only a week later, Raes the Younger fell victim to the pestilence. William nursed his brother. Strangely, William did not get sick, not even one moment. The sickness of his brother was very ugly, very violent. Raes the Younger fought for his life with the vigour of a still powerful, strong and intelligent *Gentenaar*, but he too had to surrender to the will of God.

In the large complex of the *Brabantstraat*, the now huge house of the van Lakes, William, the youngest son of the van Lake family, was the only survivor of the once so powerful and thriving van Lake weavers and cloth merchants. William buried his brother with his own hands in sacred ground, but then he sat for days on end alone in the house, without moving, sitting on a chair in the finely decorated hall of his father. It seemed to him his life was finished, had lost sense. Why had the sickness spared him? What fate had God reserved for him? Should he not die too? He hoped he still had a daughter and a son who might have survived, but at that moment he only thought about his loss. He had loved his wife dearly, depended on her in everything he did.

After several days of loneliness and sad stupor, he emerged from his daze, another man, a new determination in his mind. He ate, which he had practically not done for days, dressed, and walked to the Bijloke, where he hoped to be of some help.

Not more than one in five nuns had survived in the Bijloke convent, the abbess was gone already quite some time. William found the new abbess, a young woman, in a hall of dying men, cleaning all alone the blood and vomit from a man. He told her he wanted to help. The abbess knew William. She didn't say much. With only two other nuns and a young doctor remaining, almost nobody to care for the sick, she accepted William eagerly.

William van Lake helped in the Bijloke, in the ward of the sick, for several months. He slept in the convent. When the abbess heard he could read Latin and Greek, she showed him the old books on medicines the nuns had gathered in their library, and William looked through these volumes in search for remedies, finding nothing of interest to help relieve the sick. He did

find remedies to ease the pain, and medicines to dull the mind and so forget the horror. He worked in the abbey during the day, at the side of the abbess, and read a few hours at night. The abbess told him he was overestimating his forces, which was true, but William never fell ill, and the abbess had become an almost old woman in the timespan of those months, exhausted and depressed. By the end of August, the pestilence largely spent and leaving Ghent, he returned home.

In the fullers' family of the Denout, fullers no more but traders now, John Denout and his wife Selie Scivaels became sick at almost the same moment as the van Lakes. John Denout, then sixty-six but still a vigorous man, fell from a ladder in one of his mills by a sudden dizziness. His workers, white on the face from fear of catching the sickness, nevertheless brought John home, to his coughing and feverish wife. They were sick only two days and then died. They were cared for by their son Pieter, and their daughter-in-law Kerstin. Pieter and Kerstin became a little ill, prepared for the worse, held hands and went to lie down for a while, but they fought the sickness and continued their work. They were very happy to know their children, their son Martin and twin daughters Wivine and Quintine were living at Terhagen. They hoped Terhagen had not been touched. Pieter and Kerstin lived on in sadness and mourning. They went to the houses of their friends for news.

The family of the Pharaïldis group in which only one person died, was the shipper's family of de Hert. Arnout de Hert succumbed to the illness after a very short but violent suffering. He did not die easily. He felt his breath leave his lungs. He thrashed with his arms and legs, sending his poor wife, Marie Scivaels, sprawling on the floor. He died quickly, but in terrible agony, feeling the waters of the rivers he had sailed on engulfing him and choking him. Arnout the brave had not deserved such terrible agony. Marie, though desperate, never got ill. She even tended to her sister Selie, John Denout's wife, when her sister caught the illness. Marie would live on.

The other members of the de Hert family seemed immune from the pestilence, for John de Hert, Nete or Kerstin did not get ill, and also not the fair, noble Beatrise van Vaernewijc, who lived on. Had Beatrise died, John would have taken his own life! Maybe John had saved his family because he had sent them on board of one of his largest river boats. Even Nete slept with them, cooked and washed during the four months they lived in that boat, from May to September. John de Hert allowed no one on land to touch his ship, and he alone went on land to fetch food. He brought back little, barely any meat, bread and cheese, fruit, vegetables, and fish. The vegetables and bread he bought directly from the men who produced them, not from the stalls in the markets. He was able to visit his sister Kerstin and the other members of the Pharaïldis families who remained.

When John thought the sickness had subsided, he took another boat and, avoiding all contact, he sailed to the bay of Axel to give news of Ghent there, and to hear how his children fared at castle Terhagen. Beatrise made that trip with him.

The pestilence raged in Ghent from May to September, claiming as many as four hundred dead people a day at its peak. The pestilence was a gruesome way to die from, and about fifteen thousand people, more than a fourth of the total population of the city had died in that timeframe. In July and in August, dead men and women could be seen lying in the streets, rotting in the rain or the blazing sun, horribly disfigured, half blackened, only to be fetched several days later. The communal services of Ghent slowed down when the sickness struck at its fullest, but the services never stopped entirely.

About one-third of the twenty-six aldermen died, one third more suffered from the illness, a few aldermen lost their minds from sorrow and horror, but each day the remaining aldermen

met and discussed what could be done to alleviate the horror. To the sickness itself, they could do nothing at all. They also could not keep the pestilence from spreading. They sent out messengers to the hospitals, however, asking for what the monks and nuns needed, and they provided the help they could give. They called on volunteers, mostly the men who had recovered from the sickness and therefore were considered to have fended off the scourge. They organised these volunteers in teams to serve in the hospitals and to fetch the dead in the streets, gruesome tasks both.

Heinric Vresele led many such groups of men, and he proved invaluable to the aldermen. Heinric also did not get ill, and thought of himself as immune because he had been a pious, effaced man, not given to sexual intercourse with women. God had spared him, he surmised. The aldermen later made these men knock at every door of every street of Ghent, forcibly open them when no one responded, and then the men searched for corpses inside the houses. At the houses in which everybody had died, they brought out the corpses, closed the doors again with chains, and marked them with secret signs. When children were found, the men brought them to the orphanages, and helped the nuns and monks to find halls in which these children could be cared for, could be given food, a bed, and a smiling face.

The aldermen also reinforced the White Hoods guards of the town. They made groups of guards patrol in Ghent, day and night, to look for thieves, arrest these, execute the most arduous criminals, and guard the most well-known houses in which they knew every family member had died. The aldermen continued to function, though far more slowly and painstakingly than before.

Three fourths of the priests, monks and nuns died in the awful months of the pestilence in Ghent, and as many doctors. Holy masses were still almost exclusively sung in the Saint John church, but some religious zeal survived the pestilence. The people reacted in two very different ways to the pestilence months.

One half of the population sank to their knees in the churches, praised God when they had survived, prayed to God to be allowed to live on when they had not yet been troubled by the sickness, or prayed in despair at the slightest cough or fever. Although few priests were left alive, the churches filled with these people. Very many people followed mass on their knees, whereas before, they had stood proudly in the church.

The other half lost all hope on redemption, drank their souls to stupor, brawled and quarrelled in the streets, and arrived in great numbers throughout the day in the inns that offered girls for sexual pleasure. The prostitutes became rich, but very many also died.

The White Hoods of Ghent tried to control such establishments, but closed none. The guards preferred to let the inns exist and thrive. They only stopped rapists who roamed the streets and attacked virtuous women shamelessly, in broad daylight. Executing people was a privilege of the count and the bailiff, but the guards punished and killed when they thought such judgement justified. The bailiff agreed.

During that time, more comedians than the aldermen knew existed in Ghent, performed miracle plays in the markets. They now showed in almost all of these plays the wickedest creature on earth and in the heavens, the creature that surely had sent the pestilence: the fallen black angel, the devil. The sheer existence of such a creature, which the Evangelists mention only a few times, was now pointed at as the one responsible for the sickness. The devil became a powerful supernatural angel to fear. The miracle plays had much success only in the later months of the year, for the people had understood instinctively they had better not flock together in large numbers.

\*\*\*\*\*

When the pestilence reached Ghent, I, Jehan Terhagen did the ugliest deed of my entire life, one I had dreaded, and for which I suffered nightmares for the rest of my days. I stockpiled reserves of food. I pulled up the drawbridge of New Terhagen, of Cat Terhagen, of Happy Terhagen, of Love Terhagen, and let nobody go out or come in to the castle. Even when families with children stood crying, weeping, shouting, cursing or blessing and begging, at the other side of the moat, I allowed no man or woman or child to enter. The women inside my castle scolded me, made angry eyes, and even some of the men looked doubtful, but my determination did not waver. It is difficult for a man to hate himself and then to recover, but that is exactly what I did. I had promised the Pharaïldis men to bring back their loved ones unscathed!

I kept the men of the castle inside, standing behind the crenellations and on my towers, wearing cocked crossbows all. I shouted back at the people we let nobody in my castle. I was sorry.

One group of people who asked for mercy defeated my determination, one group only. End May, Lauwers Christiaens and Lammin Metsers had begun to comprehend and to see with their own eyes the horror of infested Axel. An early afternoon, they stood at my moat, begging to be granted access, as I had offered them some time ago. They had been so scared of what they had seen, they told me they were afraid even to stay at their farm. They were convinced only total isolation might help.

To my dearest friends Lauwers and Lammin, I shouted back they could come inside. I thereby took a huge risk, but I had neither the stomach nor the heart nor the cruelty of mind to refuse them. Even the fearing glances of my guards could not stop my pity. Lauwers and Lammin stood there, on the other side of the moat, with a dozen people in all, women and children, boys and girls.

I shouted, ‘you can come in, you all, but you must do as I say. I want to see you all naked! Strip of all your clothes and place your clothes on one heap. All of you, I want to see you naked! I am coming out now, and I shall inspect you. The women must not protest, or they stay on the grass. Then, I want you to jump in the water of the moat. Try not to drown, sprinkle water over you. I want to see your heads under water too, for a considerable time! Only then will I let you in!’

The women protested, of course, the men cursed, the children wept, but I repeated what I wanted, telling them I wanted them to do what was good for their souls and bodies. I did not want to risk the sickness entering the castle and kill us all. I had no idea what had happened had I found the tiniest swellings in armpits on some of the men, women or children, but I had Everdey and Mathis stand next to me with a crossbow and a sword.

I remained on the tower, until they all stripped, showed their nakedness to me, and I made them show me their armpits and their private parts. Then, I pointed to the water. They dipped into the water and stayed there, splashing and laughing awkwardly. I had to repeat to push their heads into the water, feeling like John the Baptist who wanted them to be baptised a second time in the river Jordan. When they came out, pissed-off like angry ducks, I let them step one by one into the castle, but in the yard the women of Clean Terhagen stood with arms crossed, stern eyes, a pair of crossbows and large tubs, and we washed them all a second time. We gave them the spare clothes we had and burned the heap of dirty shirts and tunics and shoes on the moat, without touching them.

The Christiaens and the Metsers were very angry at me for a few days, but at the end of their stay, when they returned home, they thanked me, and told me I had done the right thing! They told me I had saved them. Well, maybe I had!

Yes, we all survived at New Terhagen, but the months passed slowly. Geert van Dorp, my steward and partner at Old Terhagen, also survived with his family. He too had forced beggars and afflicted families to leave. The Christiaens and the Metsers learned to wash every week of the year!

I admit New Terhagen was over-crowded when the Christiaens and the Metsers joined us. I thought I knew how Noah felt when he had taken on the families in his ark, but my conscience was in a better shape when I saved them. I also had more men to defend the castle, now. We taught all the men and women inside to fight with weapons, with swords and maces and axes, and they learned to fight like the best.

The women learned to shoot the crossbows while the men fought with steel. The women managed to cock the crossbows that had jackscrews, so that they could use the screw to wind the cords back until the pawl above the trigger engaged the string. We had also a few old crossbows, for which the men had to bend down, attach the hook at their belt to the cord and then straighten up to pull the string back. These crossbows were too hard to cock for the women.

Three women shot better than Everdey and Mathis, but don't ask me how they did that. I guess women have better instincts than some of us, men, for taking aim.

If necessary, I could place near to twenty warriors on the walls of my castle. We were determined men and women, for I told them often how important it was to stick to our plan. The effect on my three guards, now proud group leaders, on Ywen, Everdey and Mathis, was that they became grimmer by the day and more determined than I.

No group of warriors tried to attack New Terhagen while the pestilence raged in the Four Crafts. I should have realised the sickness weakened so much so many people, nobody thought of assaulting a castle.

I rode each week out of New Terhagen to visit Beoostenblijje. In the beginning I rode out alone, then with one or two men of Terhagen. Beoostenblijje lay even more isolated than Terhagen. Everything went well at the manor. They too had taken the count's guards inside the walls, and then shut the domain off from the outside world. Only once had inhabitants of Axel asked for refuge. John de Smet told me a few sick people had come crying at the manor. John kept his mind as hard as mine, and never let anybody in. I had more and more issues with that attitude, but forced myself to keep strong. Heyla had taken in the count's guards for defence, before the pestilence had reached the Four Crafts.

Heyla de Smet remained radiant as ever. She gave birth in that period to her second child, a daughter called Joanna. She was very happy to have Marie Vresele, my sister, at her side. Marie was Heyla's midwife, but the delivery proceeded to satisfaction, easily, with no complications.

The saddest moment came at Beoostenblijje when John de Hert arrived in his ship and shouted at the gate of the manor the sad news of the many deceased of Ghent. I was at Beoostenblijje when he came. We opened the gate, but John refused to come in, and he didn't want us to hug him or otherwise touch him. He did so to keep any infection out of Beoostenblijje. John had tears in his eyes when he gave us the long list of names of the deceased in our families. We all felt for Gerolf Vresele, for Avezoete Wulslager, my step-mother, who had given me so much love, for Wouter de Smet and his wife, for Raes van Lake the Elder and his wife, for Veerle de Smet and Raes the Younger, and for William's beautiful wife Mechtild. John Denout and

his wife had died, and also Arnout de Hert. The patriarchs of the Pharaïldis families had been wiped out. We understood then, that except for Gillis Vresele, we, the younger generation, now had to learn to rule our lives without the counsel of the formidable men who had been like fathers to us all.

When I rode back to Terhagen, I felt extremely sad, like a fatherless man, even with Gillis still amongst us. The announcement of the deceased men and women of Ghent shook also the members of our families who had remained in my castle into a long sadness and mourning.

While at New Terhagen with so many people, I was helped, supported even, and comforted by two dear friends, by Martin Denout and by Quintine Denout.

Martin became my closest friend during his stay at Terhagen, the young man to whom I readily explained my bad feelings, my remorse, my doubts, and also my joys.

Quintine and I grew towards each other, until I began to think I was in love. She walked suavely too when I was near, like her sister, but in her eyes shone a warmer glint and a more intelligent ray. We became very congenial with each other. I admired her, because she brought me fine counsel. She was very intelligent, like her brother, very sympathetic to me. She never went cross on me and had an inexhaustible supply of patience to offer me. The situation at New Terhagen, the way I felt responsible for so many people, was not one prone to declarations of love, but Quintine was the first woman I felt close to. We looked at each other with tender eyes, developed a conspiratorial attitude, came to touch if only by a caress of the hand or a shoulder that lingered a little too long against a back or a breast, but we did not declare.

I also rode to the abbey of Ter Hage at the end of November. Abbess Amalberga, a new and still very young Amalberga, asked me whether I was sick. I answered, puzzled, of no, and then she categorically refused to let me in, which was very astute of her. The abbey still cared for many sick. She too had by now decided for herself the illness was some sort of infection that spread by touch or breathing, among other possible causes. I explained to her at the gate what the situation in Ghent was like, and how we had survived at New Terhagen and at Beoostenblijje. She told she understood my situation, my dilemma, and she accepted my strictness. She even gave me some sort of absolution, as Evrard Vresele had done after a confession in my chapel. Amalberga said one in four nuns had contracted the pestilence and had died.

When I told her the sickness was diminishing in Ghent, she exclaimed, ‘thank God for that! Will we indeed see the end of our martyrdom?’

I realised she had lived her share of sufferings. I gave her some hope, telling her that quite many people never got the sickness, and that others got sick but recovered. She told me few people who had the sickness at Axel had lived. She thought half the town had been wiped out. I promised to come back to Ter Hage, turned my horse and rode to my castle.

We remained inside New Terhagen until the end of November. Geert van Dorp, who had ridden to Axel, told us the sickness was spent at the town. We had heard the same from John de Hert for Ghent. September and October were the months the sickness had taken the highest toll, but then the number of the sick declined rapidly. We pushed the drawbridge down, embraced Geert van Dorp, and I rode out with two of my guards to warn Beoostenblijje. We did not let the women and children out until December of 1349, feasted Christmas all together, although the Christiaens and the Metsers had by then returned to Axel. We were convinced the sickness would be stopped by the harsh winter that followed.

## Chapter 3. After the Plague. Winter 1349 – Autumn 1351

### After the Wave

In Ghent and in Flanders, the pestilence lasted well into the winter of from 1349 to 1350. The highest toll of dead and sick was suffered in September and October of 1349. In Ghent, during those two months, about ten thousand people died. On some days, up to four hundred men and women succumbed to the fever, vomiting blood, scratching open their swellings, and suffering horribly. By the end of October still about two hundred people lost their lives each day, but that number slackened in November and December. It seemed the cold of that harsh winter had diminished the virulence of the disease.

The population of Flanders and Brabant sought to blame someone, for some sort of catharsis was needed so that the people could point fingers, and cry out, ‘this man or woman caused so much pain to us,’ as people like as part of the process of consoling themselves and come to grips with a terrifying catastrophe. In Brabant, the great rage was released on the Jewish community, much more than in Flanders. In the last months of 1349, all the Jews were exterminated in Antwerp and in Brussels. Many Jewish people of Flanders left the cities and hid in the countryside.

Much less dead had been counted among the nobles, the knights and lords of the castellanies. Nevertheless, the nobility, also the knights of the cities, suffered losses. The kings, dukes and counts lost loved ones.

Jeanne de Bourgogne, the lame queen of King Philip VI of France passed away. Philip, who was then fifty-six years old, remarried the seventeen year old Blanche de Navarre.

The wife of the heir to the French throne, the wife of the future King John II, Bonne of Luxemburg, died in 1349.

In England died the friend of Gerolf Vresele, William of Ockham.

During the pestilence, the truce between France and England had been upheld. The French armies merely tried to recapture the harbour town of Calais on the English, hoping to profit from the treachery of an English leader who proposed to open the gates of the city in exchange for a hefty amount of gold coins. The English heard in time of the impending treason, so King Edward quickly took a small army to Calais, reinforced the town, and defeated the onrushing French troops in a series of skirmishes. Except for this event, the truce held.

King Edward III survived from the pestilence in his land, and so did his sons. He held tourneys in various cities of the realm, and kept a splendid court to indicate to his people life had not stopped, and would not stop. The king’s authority had been kept intact. Life would go on as before. The pestilence was a temporary setback in the designs of the king, but Edward made sure his people heard the pestilence had raged as hard in France as in England. Edward embarked on an ambitious program of building new castles, and of adding wings and towers to his castle of Windsor and to his palace at Westminster.

Diplomatic negotiations, discussions merely, continued among the princes of the moment, despite the devastations of the sickness.

Emperor Charles IV handed over to Duke John of Brabant the last rights the German empire still held over Brabant. The treaty came to be known as the Golden Charter. It guaranteed that

Brabant was free from any foreign jurisdiction. The emperor also ceded to Duke John the imperial abbey of Nivelles, which John was to hold in feudal fief for the emperor.

While Edward III spent his money on tournaments, King Philip VI of France added more lands to his royal domains. He bought the town and environs of Montpellier from the king of Majorca. He also acquired the county of Vienne and other territories from the count of that land. The count of Vienne was called the dauphin, the leader, in the language of the region. King Philip VI gave these territories to his grandson, the later King Charles V, who was henceforth called the dauphin. The dauphin became the title given to heirs of the throne of France.

The Truce of Calais was renewed until at least April of 1351. It seemed the pestilence had temporarily quenched King Edward's resolve to conquer the throne of France.

Adding to the chaos caused by the sickness, a new period of very bad weather with incessant rains ruined the spring of 1350. Spring was the time for sowing, but the seeds rotted in the sodden ground. The crops of Flanders, Brabant and Picardy would yield much less grain in 1350 than in the previous years. Famine threatened, and prices of grain rose. Large fields were also left untended for lack of farmers and journey men, who had died from the sickness. The Hanza traders of Bruges and the merchants of Ghent tried to import grain from the Baltic states and from Germany, but German pirates soon noticed the rich Flemish fleets and attacked them in their seas. Flanders began to lack grain.

During and after the summer of 1350, the war between France and England resumed. The drums of war started beating again rapidly.

At the end of August, Louis of Male, the count of Flanders, had to allow the king of Castille, allied to France, to assemble a fleet of galleys at Sluis. This fleet sailed to England, to capture as many English vessels as possible, especially the English cogs that sailed between England and Guyenne. Don Carlos de la Cerda, the admiral of that fleet, commanded over more than forty ships. He sailed to England, but King Edward III and his son, the prince of Wales, intercepted the galleys with an English fleet of war-cogs at Winchelsea. A sea-battle was fought. The battle raged from evening to nightfall, a ferocious combat of galleys against cogs. The English were once more victorious at sea. They captured no less than fourteen Castilian galleys. As before, the English archers had won the day. The rest of the Castilian fleet was destroyed, or fled in disarray.

On the twenty-second of August 1350, King Philip VI of Valois died at Nogent-le-Roi. Immediately, his son John was crowned as King John II. The new king was a brave man, but arrogant and boastful, who possessed the inadequacies of his father in even greater quantity. He doubted less about what he wanted to do, but proclaimed his decisions rather impulsively, not waiting for precious, judicious advice. He was prone to blind rages when he could not get what he wanted. John was not an evil man by character, though, he would be called the Good by his people. He could be very charming with the men and women of his entourage. Because he was impetuous, he made quick but careless decisions, being unable to wisely consider the consequences of his actions before he embarked on them. Added to this defect of character, he proved also obstinate, impossible to change of opinion, even in view of evidence to the contrary of his beliefs or convictions. He refused to listen to sound advice and rational arguments. Although he was generally a charming and generous man, he could have bouts of extreme vindictiveness. Like his father, he remained uneasy about his rights to the throne of France. This developed into a paranoid fear of treachery, which could lead him into sheer panic. John II the Good, maybe as a consequence of his constant fear for being betrayed by

the nobles of his court, employed many commoners as his advisors, and these came to be despised by his courtiers. His lay advisors satisfied his enormous appetite for riches. He was avid for money. In those times after the great mortality, he spent the income of his kingdom not on preparations for war, but on the arts and on his thirst for luxury.

Treason hung indeed around John II. He accused the *connétable* of France, the count of Eu, to have ceded his castle and county of Guines to King Edward III for money. The count of Eu had been a prisoner of England, unable to raise his ransom. Eu had therefore indeed exchanged his castle for his freedom. Guines lay not far from Calais, the fortress had great strategic value for the defence of the region of the great harbour of the north. John II had the count of Eu beheaded. He then appointed Charles of Spain, a very unpopular knight, as *connétable*. This alienated the courtiers of France ever more.

To quench his thirst for money, John II manipulated the French currency. He ordered the French coins to be reminted several times, each time with lower proportions of gold or silver. In the very first year of his reign, John II ordered no less than eighteen such changes, devaluations of his currency.

Count Louis of Male passed the pestilence years of 1349 and 1350 in his castle of Male near Bruges. He ruled in good relations with the notables of Flanders. The peace with the cities lasted, as the old lineages of poorter-knights gained once more the upper hand in the cities. Louis's power and assurance in that power rose so much, he dared confronting the king of France. John II ordered Louis of Male to do formal homage to him. The count of Flanders refused! Louis's ambassadors claimed he could only do homage to the new French king after the castellanies of Lille, Douai and Orchies had been restituted to Flanders. This was an old claim of Flanders, supported as well in his times by James van Artevelde.

To continue putting pressure on John II, Louis also entered negotiations with Edward III to have his daughter Margaret, who had been born in that same year of 1350, to be married to an English prince. Louis's court heard in shock, open mouthed, when Louis thus challenged the king of France! The wisest of his counsellors smiled. They had expected something like this to happen! Louis of Male, then merely twenty, had developed a mind of his own. Louis had felt instinctively no lord of Flanders would have challenged his opinions by then. Not all his courtiers found his ideas sound, though, but Louis of Male was with the cities strong enough to defy France. If he considered himself now powerful enough to oppose the king of France, how strong then was he not to defy his own noble lords, to force them too into submission? The knights realised the count could use the old families of the cities, who dominated the cities' militia, to defend and enforce his views. Louis's courtiers pinched their lips together, and did not object, preferring to flatter the count rather than to challenge him. Louis of Male was grateful, and relied more and more on his wealthy merchants for advice. The flattering slowly had its effect. Louis could not do anything wrong anymore, his views were accepted as soon as he pronounced them. He grew rapidly out of his image of being a shy, doubting youth who had not been taken seriously. Louis evolved into a man of strength, who expected his word to be law.

\*\*\*\*\*

Most of the guests at my castle of New Terhagen believed, as I, that the pestilence would end after the spring of 1350. Along the spring and with the somewhat warmer weather, despite the incessant rains, the minds of my guests became more and more restless. The men wanted to return to their business, they loathed the inaction into which the sickness had driven them, even though they recognised they were still alive whereas so many others had died in Ghent. They, and I, began roaming in the countryside.

At the end of March, I dared to ride to Ghent. Everdey and Mathis accompanied me as escort.

I rode into Ghent coming from the north, riding through the *Grauwpoort*. From there on I followed the *Oudburg* along the Leie, the Alins Hospital and the *Kraanlei* to the Saint Veerle Square and the 's *Gravenbrug*. I rather expected to find Ghent half in ruins, but to my amazement, nothing seemed to have changed in the city! The pestilence had harmed the people, not the stones of the city. That made me wonder what constituted the word Ghent we used so much. The monuments of Ghent were marvellous, of course, and we loved the daedalus of streets, the proud *stenen*. I could admire the towers of the city, the Saint John Church, the Belfort, Saint James, Saint Michael's. What was Ghent, however, was it the mass of stones so marvellously piled into beautiful buildings? Would Ghent always be Ghent as long as Roeland chimed in the Belfort? No, I decided. Ghent is not the stones, not the towers, not the churches or the abbeys, not the hospitals and not the houses! That Ghent might disappear with time, overgrown by trees and shrubs without the men maintaining them. This town, these heaps of stones had only a soul and a meaning because of the people who lived here, who had built the fame, the wealth and the freedom of the city, and how these people had wanted to live here, together, in peace, in safety, and free. Ghent meant the inhabitants, the poorters of the town. The history and fate of Ghent could only be the history and the fate of the men and women who lived here! Ghent was a state of mind, the way of living and the beliefs of the people who lived in the stones, under the wooden beams of the roofs. Ghent was how they reflected, fought and reacted to what happened to them. Only that Ghent, the people, not the stones, had been overturned and modified by the sickness! Nevertheless, it was also the essence of the city that had been terribly hurt.

I then began to notice I detected no large crowds anymore in the streets and squares. Before the pestilence, the streets of Ghent had been filled with shouting and working and walking men and women. A lot less laughter and shouting sounded in the city. The men still hurried to right and left of me, but the people whispered more instead of talking loudly and boisterously. They made no wide gestures of their hands, and they seemed to me much less joyful. They scurried to their businesses now, rarely held their head high to challenge my eyes by a glance. Heads remained bowed. Had the pestilence tamed my proud, joyous Ghent?

'All the Flemings must feel like this,' I surmised, whispering in the wind.

I knew then what I should be looking for, for abandoned houses! Houses closed, gathering dust, with smashed-in windows or doors, should be the signs of the workings of the sickness and the vandalism of the poor. I saw quite a few of such houses, but they did not change much the general aspect of the town. Yes, my city would live. The stones invited us to be filled once more with vibrant life!

I lived in a castle of the countryside and I loved my current home, but Ghent would always remain my original home, the town and environment in which I had received first love, studied, and played with my young friends, grown-up men and women now. I had to find out how many of them had survived, and who were the ones who had died.

I passed the 's *Gravenbrug*, going to the Fish Market and I entered and left the Meat Hall. Everdey and Mathis did not say a word in Ghent. They too recognised the new stateliness that hung over the city. Ghent seemed like a giant party of people in the mood of after a funeral. Far less people, all with slower movements and sterner faces went in the otherwise so popular, crowded Meat Hall, and also in the streets of the *kuipe*, in the *Korte Munt*, the Corn Market and *Tussen Bruggen*. Numerous river boats still lay at the quays of the Leie, but the men who brought sacks to the Corn Market were fewer, spoke less, and hurried more. I stepped down from my horse and walked along *Tussen Bruggen*, found nobody I could say hello to, nobody I knew, contrary to what would have happened a year ago. I would always have found men to

start a small conversation with, people I could greet. The joy had left Ghent! Had the city become a stranger to me and I a stranger to her?

I walked down the Saint Thomas Street, admired the wonderful church of Saint Michael, and entered the *Kalanderberg*. I changed my mind there, went into the Saint John's Street to have a look at Saint John's Church, the finest of Ghent. I admired once more the formidable building, the pride of Ghent, turned into the *Kruisstraat* and walked back to the *Kalanderberg* to say hello to Gillis Vresele, if he was in. This was the Ghent of the *kuipe*, the centre of the Ghent I loved. I realised this Ghent would live. It might take a few tens of years, but this Ghent would rise from the devastation of the sickness, for Ghent were not these marvellous heaps of stone, however impressive they looked. Ghent was the name for the people who lived here, for the families and lineages who had decided to live together within walls, at a prosperous site, where they could live in peace, in freedom, and work for the well-being of their families. Many families had lost loved ones, but the lineages, most of them, had not been wiped out, would regenerate and live, differently from before, but they would be continued. Of that I was sure. I hoped the sickness would be stopped by the cold, dreary winter, never to harass us again. I thanked God for having saved so many. Ghent had survived! A few signs testified to the living, thriving city. The sign-boards of the inns and of the shops glittered silver and gold paint, as lively as ever. There were fewer stalls on the markets, but stalls there were again. The people seemed to make less noise, but the markets had remained and the noise of the looms banging and working could still be heard. The blacksmiths hammered, were back at work, the breweries rolled out vats of beer.

I visited Gillis Vresele, then. We embraced. His maid-servants poured us wine in his great hall. He was alone, now, but also of his family, many had survived at New Terhagen. We talked, promised to hold a Pharaïldis group meeting in late spring. After Gillis, I visited my other friends of the Pharaïldis families. Their mood was low, they had tears in their eyes when they told me about how great the mortality had been in Ghent. We hugged and held each other. They mourned their dead.

\*\*\*\*\*

When I rode back to New Terhagen, I thought much about who or what had unleashed the great mortality on the world. Had God indeed wanted to punish us for our pride? Had we lived too vainly and spent not enough on charity, on love for our fellow-citizens, quarrelled too much? I decided there and then to give more money to the convents, especially to the convent of Ter Hage. The nuns had cared for many sick people of the town and countryside of Axel. What had I done? So very little! More money also should be spent studying the pestilence. If ever it assailed us anew, we should be better prepared. I began also to wonder what kind of God had created a universe in which so much sorrow could happen daily. I did not understand. Part of me revolted against this creation of violence, sickness, death, and suffering. What was the meaning of all this cruelty in the creation of a God of love? I sighed. There was so little I understood of our world!

I also thought of Quintine Denout. I was still in a quandary about that woman. When and how should I declare I loved her and considered her the one I wanted to spend the rest of my days with? Would she like living with me at New Terhagen, she a ravishing girl of the grand city of Ghent? I was a man of thirty now, still young and vigorous, but Quintine was only eighteen. Would she not consider me an old and oddly romantic man for her? She was a serious young woman, quite mature for her age, a pious woman, a very intelligent and poised person, too. How does one talk to such a formidable woman about matters of love?

I could not just go up to her and flap out, ‘Quintine Denout, you are my only love. I want to take you to bed and have children by you and I want you to live forever at New Terhagen.’ No, that wouldn’t do! She might think of me as of an arrogant bastard, slap me and run off in one of her female fits of angers I had seen at Terhagen. Yes, she could be a passionate girl too, my Quintine! Or worse, she might laugh at me in my face, tell me I was a stupid man, too old for her. I did not think of myself as of a handsome man. I was clumsy at everything. What should I do? How did one talk to women about love and affection without sounding ridiculous? I could ask Gillis Vresele, but Gillis had remained in Ghent. I rode on.

A little later, back at New Terhagen, I made two fundamental mistakes that were to transform my life entirely.

After my first trip to Ghent, I arrived back at New Terhagen, and told everything I had seen and heard in town. Life settled as before. I told everybody we should still stay on at New Terhagen for a while, at least until after spring, and make sure the pestilence did not return or continue in April or May of 1350. I saw more now of Quintine. She accompanied me on long walks to the farm and into the pastures around our castle, into the woods. We walked to the bay of Axel. I showed her our boathouse, talked to her about the tunnel. In fact, I inspected my lands, looked around at what could and should be done about the fields.

One evening, when I had walked for hours with Quintine and with her brother Martin, having also taken my horse on a long walk deeper into the countryside, I went to my room early and slept. In the middle of the night, when all was very dark, I heard feet shuffling near my bed. I instinctively moved my arm to the chair where my dagger hung, but a soft arm withheld me. A voice hushed me, pushed my arm back into the bed. In the light of the silvery moon that shone through my window, my eyes getting accustomed to the darkness, I detected a shape of a woman opening the blankets I slept in, drawing a long, white shirt over her head, and long light hair hanging over her head and shoulders. A naked body touched my legs, brought her legs over mine, came to lay on my belly. I slept in the nude. The warm, soft skin of the woman touched me, sunk down on me, and I felt heavy breasts sag a while above my lips, then move lower. I thought Quintine had decided to come to me. A little later, she pushed me into her. I heard a little cry of pleasure, and then my hands explored her back, her buttocks, her breasts. I suddenly realised this woman was a little more lusty, of a more glorious shapes of ampler forms on me than Quintine could be. I should have repulsed the woman then, for I recognised with my fingers the luxurious, curvaceous forms of Wivine. We were already both moving together, however, fast and passionate, at the same rhythm, and I had been deprived for so long of the lust and the feelings Wivine now aroused so powerfully in me, that I could not stop. We did not move long to reach a climax. Wivine made love to me several times during the night. I took her body as she took mine, and we exhausted our passions. I was quite aware I was doing something intrinsically wrong, but the emotions Wivine aroused in me were too strong to resist. Wivine taught me that night how wonderfully passion could be spent. We must have fallen asleep, but when I woke in the morning, Wivine was gone from my room.

Later in the morning, I was having breakfast alone in the hall of New Terhagen, gloomily sitting at a corner of my long table, a fire blazing in the hearth because the air had suddenly grown cold again. We burnt a lot of wood that winter, in many places of the castle, for the air was not only cold but also very humid, the humidity that passed through our heavy woollen clothes. The cats entered one by one and settled around us and the warmth of the hearth.

Wivine came to sit in front of me, a lopsided grin on her face. She had fetched a platter of bread, some bacon, pieces of dried herring, and a glass of milk. I stared at her, but she kept her head bowed. Then, suddenly, she looked straight at me, smiled flirtingly, beatifically and knowingly, grinned again. She pouted her heart-shaped lips to a kiss.

I awoke from a bad dream. Yes, I had honoured Wivine in my bed this past night, not Quintine! What had I done? Wivine must have remarked the darkness in my eyes, for I saw also the light in her eyes dim. I reddened. I would have to marry Wivine now, not Quintine. I did like Wivine. She resembled her sister so much! She had a wonderful, luxurious body, a thin waist and otherwise generous forms, a fine, more fleshy face than her sister, a body which would have sent any man into amorous raptures, and she was a gentle, optimistic girl. She had been the master of my bed, but did I love her? Could I see Quintine in her and love Wivine, her twin sister, too? I had never talked to Wivine like I talked to Martin and to Quintine!

We ate that morning, said little, but I realised the eighteen-year Wivine was much more the master of the situation than the unfortunate lord of Terhagen! While she drank her milk, rivulets of the white liquid flowed down her sensual lips to her chin. She wiped off her chin with her right hand, and then she placed that hand on my hand. It was all right, that hand said, you should not feel sorry for having made love to me out of wedlock. I too wanted you! I liked what happened this night, too! I came to you willingly.

At that moment, Martin Denout, Alise and Avezoete van Lake entered the hall, and they remarked our intertwined hands. They smiled knowingly.

Also Quintine appeared in the open doorway. When I wanted to withdraw my hand from under Wivine's, Wivine's fingers grabbed and held my hand, squeezed and held my fingers. She took possession of me in front of her sister. A smile of triumph came over Wivine's face. I glanced from Wivine to her sister, who stood behind her. Quintine's face wrung into a look of pain and disgust. She diverted her eyes from me, and stepped on. She went to sit next to the van Lake sisters, on my side of the table, far from me, so that I could not look directly at her. She sat behind the others who had come to sit in the hall. Wivine kept on to my hand. My glance followed Quintine, but she avoided to look back at me. She knew already. Had her world collapsed as had mine?

That same day, I escaped from New Terhagen, telling I would not return for a few days. I rode east and north, alone, and I galloped rapidly on the first stretch, wanting to put as much distance between me and my castle as I possibly could, my mind in turmoil.

I had bought all the lands I could buy on this side of the Scheldt and not too far from Axel, so now I rode to the north, farther than Dendermonde. I crossed the Scheldt, looking for opportunities around Bornem, Puurs and Niel. I had already acquired lands on the other side of the Scheldt there. I did not know the village of Niel, but knew where it was situated.

When I rode into the main street among the small cottages, I smelled the odour of putrefaction, the smell of rotting human flesh. The village was very quiet, its low, thatched houses closed around the modest church, a chapel merely. An indescribable fear suddenly gripped my heart. I had pushed my horse too far north! I had forgotten the pestilence had also moved north. I had travelled backwards in time! The more I neared Antwerp, the more the sickness might have lingered virulently, despite the cold of the winter. I wanted to turn my horse and hurry it back to the west, when a strange spectacle made me hesitate. I held in the reins of my horse, and I looked, mesmerised, at what happened at the far side of the main street of the village.

A small group of people, two dozen of men and women, walked through the village from the other end, approaching me. A man dressed in a long, coarse brown tunic, as if he were a monk, carried a huge wooden cross in front. The cross was almost as tall as he was. The man was emaciated, with unkempt hair and beard. His tunic was torn to rags. He was filthy in the face. The men and women behind him stumbling along the earthen road more than that they walked. They all wore heavy clothes, coarse, stained cloaks, but the rags hug ungainly around their bodies. Most had their backs bared despite the cold. I saw them brandishing whips. When they entered the village, they began beating the backs of the people who hobbled in front of them. I noticed the red and black blood on their cloaks. They sang psalms in Latin. A few men banged on the doors of the church with their fists, but no priest opened for them. Men and women emerged from the thatched houses, offering the group bread and jugs of milk. The women accepted this food. A few villagers grinned at the bared backs of the women. One of the women even bared her breasts enticingly, only to have her body whipped by two men following her. More women followed the example. The flagellants looked with eager eyes of curiosity at me, chanting their songs with renewed energy. I was so stunned at this strange, weird scene, that I stared with fascination and held I my horse. I thought I saw an unreal scene from the apocalypse of Saint John, a weird, unexpected, out-of-the-world scene of self-mortifying, of rare chastisement. Was this scene really happening in the Four Crafts, or was a vision unfolding before my eyes?

A dirty old man in rags, shoes enveloped equally in rags of cloth, shouted at me, ‘repent, lord, repent! God has sent the pestilence to punish you. Repent! The wrath of God is upon us! Come with us, chastise your foul soul and repent for your sins!’

I had no intention at all of following these dirty, filthy men. The women of the group conveyed on me, grabbed the reins of my horse, clung to my saddle, shouting, singing still, and screaming high I should repent. They tore at my leg and at my back with their dirty fingers. I realised too late two of those women had dark swellings on their lower arms. They were sick with the pestilence! How could they still walk? Their faces were red with fever. Maybe they had caught the sickness but were recovering. I panicked! I drove my horse forward, turned it, made it prance so that the women who were touching me were thrown against the walls of a farmhouse, which increased their screaming and cursing. Some of their rags got torn from their bodies, denuding further their skinny chests and bleeding backs. I pushed my spurs deep into my horse’s side. The animal jumped forward, and I let it gallop at full speed, out of the village, to the road to Bornem. The horse ran, and I did not stop it until I had reached the Scheldt. I had my horse walk along the stream until I found a ferry to pass the stream. When I was again on the western side of the Scheldt, I rode on to Assenede. I thought of passing the night in an inn there, but darkness fell, obliging me to sleep enveloped in my blankets, in a hollow of a wood, far from any people. I slept.

I awoke from the biting cold, at the first light, and coughed. I felt colder than ever. I trembled, my hands shook, and I had a weak head. I realised immediately, of course, what might have happened. This was not an ordinary cold! I had not escaped the pestilence. The sickness had been transferred to me from the flagellants’ touches, contaminating me. Allowing them to touch me had been my second major mistake.

What could I do? I would live or be dead in six or seven days. I could not return to Terhagen. I had to find a place where I could stay, alone, isolated. I could not return to Ghent and ask for help from somebody of the families, for I might infect parts of the town a second time. Everywhere I went, death would accompany me. The only hidden place I could think of, was the small boathouse of New Terhagen. It would be cold in the boathouse, but I would have a roof above my head. There was a hearth inside the hall, I could try to keep warm for a while. I

could buy cushions and sheets to sleep in, or use my saddle in the boat to place my head on. The horse could graze there, and would eventually be found. Close to dying, I might push the boat out and sink it in the bay, so that nobody would touch my body. The guests of New Terhagen would not suspect I hid there. I had the water of the bay to wash and bathe in if I survived. If I died, at least that would happen near the place I loved and near people I loved. I used my last force to ride to Terhagen. I bought blankets and cushions in two villages I rode by, taking care not to touch anybody. The people looked at me with curiosity, but stayed at a respectable distance. They remarked my fever and heard with apprehension I coughed.

I arrived utterly exhausted at the boathouse. I lay more on the neck of my horse than I sat in the saddle. I directed my horse only a few times, tugging at the reins and working a little with my legs. I trembled all over my body, shaken by the fevers. The food I had bought in the farms would be enough to survive for a few days. I even had other clothes than the ones I wore.

When I reached the boathouse, it was near night. I took the saddle from my horse, an effort that made me sweat as if I had been soaked in a bath. I threw the saddle in the boat, undressed, and burned all my clothes outside. I stood naked, shivering from the icy cold of early spring. The wind cut through every chink of the woodwork of the roof. I placed my new clothes, a shirt and a simple brown tunic, short trousers and stockings next to me in the boat, threw a little straw I found in the boathouse under me, and enveloped my body in blankets. I tugged two cushions against my saddle in the hull of the boat, and crawled inside it to sleep. The boathouse stood entirely isolated, low in the plains, so that the wind passed over it. I did not suffer anymore from the cold. I had started a small fire in the hearth, which petered out soon, but I was not strong enough to light a new one. I noticed the first swellings of the sickness on my upper left arm. I lay down in the hull, and closed my eyes. I sank instantly into a blissful slumber.

I woke up late the next morning, still trembling with fever. I ate the bread I had placed next to me, but vomited all out a few instants later, hanging with my head over the boat in the water. My stomach churned. My head turned all over the place.

More swellings had appeared on my arms. I drew me up and looked out of the boathouse. The day was fresh, but calm. The rains had subsided. This was a fine day to die on. I closed my eyes and slept again.

I woke out of a daze when I heard my name be called, ‘Jehan, Jehan!’

I looked up, and saw lovely Quintine Denout standing next to me, touching my head. She should not touch me at all! Nobody should touch me! Still, her hair smelled of a fresh, intoxicating perfume! I forced the temptation she was away from me.

‘Quintine, stay away from me! I have caught the sickness. Leave me alone!’

‘You need care!’

‘No, I can handle this on my own. You must leave me. You cannot go back to Terhagen, however. You have touched me! Find a place of your own, ask for a tent, maybe, whatever, near New Terhagen.’

‘One touch is not going to give me the sickness, silly! You need care. Somebody must take care of you!’

‘Not you, Quintine, nobody! Go!’

‘No, I won’t go! I cannot leave you. I have to return to Terhagen, however. I must tell them where I am, where you are, and bring a few things. We’ll stay here.’

‘No, no, no! You cannot go back to New Terhagen anymore. Find an abandoned cottage or something. The ones at Terhagen must not touch you and you should not enter new Terhagen!’

‘All right. I understand what you mean. I will stay outside and ask them to prepare things for me, then take them when they have gone. When did you arrive here?’

‘Yesterday, but I’ve been sick from the day before. Go now! Each second you stay with me is more dangerous for you. One touch is indeed enough to make you sick!’

‘All right then. Wait for me! I won’t be long.’

Quintine left the boathouse. I was happy to have seen her a last time, and happy she had listened to what I told her. But she was as stubborn as I, of course. She threw all caution to the winds.

Quintine came back an hour or so later, but I had lost all sense of time. I heard a cart stop at the boathouse. She brought things into the hall. She had brought a larger cushion to sleep on. I protested, but she placed that painstakingly under me, which was not easy because I had almost no force anymore, and too little force to protest. I should have been more angry with her. She had new blankets, which felt dry and fresh. I felt very hot, so I told her I did not need more cover. She brought another such large cushion from the cart, placed hat one on the floor next to the boat. I understood what she was doing.

‘I don’t want you here, Quintine! For the love of God, go! I love you too much.’

There, I had said it. Quintine didn’t even react.

‘Stop telling me what to do, Jehan. I have touched you already, so if by touching one catches the sickness, I have it already. I was at New Terhagen. I told them to bring a cart out of the castle, and a horse. I asked them to prepare all sorts of things we might need the next days. I got food, I can make a fire and prepare soup and broth. I have more blankets. You need somebody to take care of you. When I get ill, you do the same for me.’

I pleaded, ‘don’t do it, Quintine. You’ll have the sickness too! I slept with Wivine, you know. She came to me at night and I thought she was you. So now, leave me!’

Quintine grinned. ‘I thought something like that had happened. Well, Wivine has got you sooner than I, hasn’t she, Jehan? She is much smarter than I. She used her feminine wiles to seduce you before I could. That will teach me not to be so pure and pious and haughty the next time. I should have come to your room in the night. I now wished I had! Still I am not the kind of girl to have thought of sleeping with you before we declared. You’ll have to marry Wivine, now, won’t you? At least, she’ll remind you of me every time you look at her. That may become your own, private curse. Whatever! I am going to take care of you. Maybe we shall both die, or both live. I’m here and I touched you, Jehan. It is too late already. Are you in pain?’

‘I have a fever and the swellings hurt. I feel very dazed.’

‘I suppose the fevers and the dizziness are a stage of the illness. Whether you live or die, Jehan, in a few days we shall know whether I have the sickness too or not. In the meantime, I can keep your head fresh and your body warm. I can feed you. I can clean you. That is all I can do for you. It is not much.’

Quintine nursed me the following hours. I dozed off and woke several times that day. She placed cold strips of humidified cloths on my forehead. The cloth felt fresh, smelled of fragrant herbs, of thyme and rosemary, and I liked the touch. I liked much more the presence of Quintine. She went several times to the bay to fetch water. She washed me. She had to help me even with turning over.

She giggled, ‘I too have seen you stark naked, Jehan! Wivine will not be the only one to have seen your manhood.’

‘Wivine saw nothing at all,’ I growled. ‘It was a very dark night.’

‘Oh, was it? That is a fine excuse!’

‘How did you find me here?’

‘I like walking, remember? I walked to the bay, maybe my instinct drew me to here. I saw a horse nearby, and recognised it as yours. I entered the boathouse, and found you. I touched you already at that moment, Jehan, so you mustn’t have any bad feelings. Do not think it was your fault I got infected. I touched you because I wanted to, and I surmised immediately of what sickness you were ill.’

‘That was one touch too much, Quintine. You should have fled. I came here because I didn’t want to infect New Terhagen, but I wanted to die near my castle and near to you.’

‘Yes, I realise that. Well, if the sickness spreads with the least touch, I have caught the sickness. You shall have to nurse me, Jehan!’

‘I may be long dead before that.’

‘Yes, you might. We’ll see. If you die, I’ll probably die too, Jehan, and in a certain way, if you die, I might welcome death too. I love you, you know. Saying that only adds to my being so stupid as not to have flung myself in your arms already a long time ago. Have I put you off so much? We have been spoiled and we were not used to so many opportunities to show our feelings! How silly we were! Now, your swelling, here, has burst. I must clean the wound. It may hurt a little! The water from the bay is very cold.’

Quintine Denout, my love, nursed me like a child. I remained completely passive, unable to assist her in the least. I felt ashamed and angry for being so helpless. I sank in lethargy, due to the fever. I saw in shadows how she worked, but I was unable to watch her further towards the evening. My fever ran higher. The last thing I saw how Quintine placed the quilt from the floor in the boat, next to me. She came to lie there, in the boat. I slept with her arms around me. I thought I might die during the night, but I felt oddly comforted. I had dreaded dying alone, like a stray dog. No human should die alone. Somebody stayed with me in my last moments!

The next morning, at dawn, I opened my eyes, quite astonished to notice I was still lying in the boat and in the boathouse, and still alive. The air felt warmer than the day before, but I heard rain pelting down heavily on the roof of the boathouse. Some water dropped into the boathouse at a corner. I should have that roof fixed! I smiled. I had not died during the night. I could even think clearly, though in absurd images! I felt hot, but less dazed. I was a little better in my head, it seemed to me. Over my shoulder lay the hand of a woman, a fine, long hand, with chiselled fingernails on delicate fingers. I had never seen the fingers of Quintine so close and so pretty near me. A wonder of life was such a hand! So vulnerable, so delicate, yet so beautiful! I had not dreamt what had happened to me then, the previous days. Quintine was with me! I also had preserved my memories. I looked at my arm. Many places were still black, but no new such blots had developed. I moved a little, looked at my body. I had swellings on my other arm, in the armpit, no black spots elsewhere. If the sickness had not left me, it had not progressed very much. Had a miracle happened? Dared I to hope? The body next to me moved.

I said, ‘Quintine, wake up! I think I’m a little better, today. How are you?’

I had to repeat the question and turn around before she shuddered. I had my head very close to hers. I touched her lips with mine.

Quintine replied, ‘I’m fine. It’s raining. I slept like a rock. I was tired. What did you say? Do you feel better?’

Quintine straightened. She made wide open eyes at me.

‘If you feel better, Jehan, you are going to defeat the sickness!’

‘Maybe I am. I have less a fever than yesterday.’

Quintine stood. She had a thin dress on. I had not remarked how she had come to my bed in the boat, yesterday. She hesitated a while, then went to the hearth in the boat-hall. I had that hearth made for no particular reason. I had thought I might fish in the bay one day, and might work at the boat in mid-winter. Quintine threw logs in the hearth, and used a tinder-box to start a fire.

‘The fire will make smoke, and the smoke may attract people,’ I feared. ‘We don’t want that!’ ‘The only people who will see the smoke and might come will be those of New Terhagen,’ Quintine corrected me. ‘They know we are here. I have to go back soon, and tell them you are better, but we’ll need a few days more. You need to change clothes again. We need blankets. You have once more been soaked by the sweat of the fever. The people of Terhagen should not start looking for us. I must give them news, Jehan!’

‘Yes, it would be fine if you could do that. Tell them not to expect us back for another week at least!’

Quintine nodded.

Then her eyes gleamed mischievously, ‘Wivine will not like that!’

‘No, she won’t,’ I whispered.

Quintine left the boathouse close to noon. She came back a little later. She had used the same horse and cart. When she arrived, I felt better still.

Quintine washed me, and I took on clothes, merely a short, light tunic. I was not yet strong enough to stand or to walk, but I could sit up. We stayed together and talked, as we had been used to. She sat next to me and drew my arm around her. I did not ask Quintine how Wivine had reacted on hearing I and her sister were living together in the boathouse. Quintine explained to me she had remained on the other side of the moat and shouted for what she needed. Yes, Wivine had been among the others.

We slept together for another two nights. On the fifth day, I did not feel feverish anymore. I could stand up, walk a little with Quintine holding me. I stepped to the hearth, sat there. I began to believe I would survive. Quintine washed me every day with cold water from the bay, slowly, lovingly, and I kissed her hands. We slept in the boat together.

On the seventh day, I told Quintine I would be able to walk. I wanted not yet to return to the castle, though. In the castle waited Wivine, and I might still be infectious with the pestilence. I would have to remain a few days more at the boathouse. I also thought Quintine might not catch the sickness after all. I had gotten much quicker ill.

The next day, Quintine made a fire in the morning, as she was now used to. Her back turned to me, I heard her cough. I turned white. I stepped out of the boat and went up to her, turned her dear face to me, and found her cheeks reddened.

‘Quintine,’ I exclaimed, fear in my voice.

A cold stab of dread pierced my heart.

‘Yes,’ she whispered, ‘I have the sickness. I feel feverish!’

My heart stopped beating for a few moments.

I made Quintine pull her tunic over her head, then her shirt, and I found the swellings in her armpits.

‘Now I must nurse you,’ I told her tenderly. ‘My love, my turn to care for you. I survived from the sickness, so you can too. Pray God we survive this.’

I made Quintine lay down in the boat. I helped her getting out of her clothes. She covered her breasts with her hands, but I drew them gently away. She was bewilderingly handsome, her small breasts perked high on her chest. I touched her naked skin and sought for other

swellings. I had to put a heavy strain on my determination not to draw her to me and cover her body with kisses, and take her. I washed her, enveloped her in new blankets she had brought. Quintine was violently sick that same day. She vomited the little she had eaten, but I saw no blood. That was a good sign. The swellings in her armpits grew, the ones lower on her body too. They blackened, as mine had done. She had a very uneasy night, told me the swellings hurt her very much. She wanted to scratch, I held her hands away. She slept, but thrashed in her sleep. She writhed in the covers, tangled them. She felt very hot. The fever held her in its power the rest of the day. She mostly slept this next day. Her arms, both her arms, blackened. Her fever ran higher. I refreshed her face and parts of her body constantly. I washed her hair with cold water, then the rest of her body. She shivered, but I hoped the fever would recede a little. She was ever thirsty, I gave her all the clean water to drink I had. I was not sure she recognised who was close to her.

Quintine suffered very badly for two more days. She suffered more than I. Some of her swellings burst, and I washed them, but she might keep scars on her immaculate white body. I stayed with her, slept next to her.

On the fourth day of Quintine's sickness, in the morning, she was still lost in a daze, but her breathing was quieter and strong, her pulse regular, her fever had slackened a bit.

I left her that day, without being able to tell her I merely needed to ride to castle Terhagen, to get new clothes and blankets for her. I hoped they still had spare blankets in the castle.

Quintine lay naked in the sheets then, white and beautiful as a wounded bird, frail and so fine! She lay naked, and I admired her, but she was soaked like I had been. I had forced some water in her the previous days, not much.

I took the horse and the cart and made my way to New Terhagen. I was not very well in my head, after all. I was lucky.

The steward, Geert van Dorp, met me halfway. He told me he had been worried and had wanted to come to the boathouse. I wouldn't let him approach me. I told him to toss the things he had brought, blankets among them, into my cart. Quintine was sick, now, I explained.

Terhagen would have to have a lot more patience with us, two weeks more. We would survive, I reassured. I asked Geert to bring more food, a large barrel of clean water from our well, and new clothes for Quintine. Geert promised me to bring this to the boathouse, place it all in front of the doors, call me when he had arrived. He could not come into the house, I warned, not yet.

When I returned to the boathouse, I heard Quintine scream in high tones. I ran. She was sitting up in the boat, dishevelled, panicky and crying. It was unnerving to see her so helpless. She thought I had left her to die alone. She clung to me. It took me a long time to convince her I had not left her, but had warned Terhagen we would have to remain many days still in the boathouse. My steward would come every fifth day with more food, clothes, and other things, as we might need. The days passed agonisingly slow.

From that day on, Quintine got better. She went better more slowly than I, but the sickness had been defeated on her too. Her pulse showed her blood stream flowed stronger in her body, and I thought that might cure her. I made her drink our hippocras, our spiced wine, to strengthen her. Her fever diminished in intensity. The blackness on her skin remained, but did not grow. She could think clearer, began to give me orders. Wash me here, brush my hair, turn me over, kiss me.

The sickness we both caught might not have been as virulent on us as on others. We had been strong, young persons. Maybe God had made us stronger and allowed us to live to suffer more afterwards. Wivine stayed on our mind.

After five more days, we could smile, stand and walk. Quintine was still weak, but she now refused me to wash her. She could wash herself. I confessed washing her had been more of a pleasure than of a duty, at which she slapped me on the cheek.

Quintine dared even to bathe in the bay, despite the cold. She splashed a few times, then ran quickly back to the relative warmth of the boathouse. I took the blanket off her, then, picked her up naked, placed her back in the boat under blankets, and I made love to her. She did not resist, took me in eagerly.

We continued to make love the next five wonderful days. We should have returned to castle Terhagen, then, but we did not want to think about what was happening in the world, and not about Wivine. We remained for an entire week in the boathouse, the most beautiful week of our lives. After that last week, we knew we should return. We burnt all our clothes, the blankets, my saddle, everything we had used. We washed the boat with cold water from the bay. We concluded nobody should come to the boathouse for at least another three months, until long after the spring, for we had touched about everything in the building. We put everything we had touched and that was loose on a large fire outside. I even tore the cart we had used to pieces, and threw the wood on the pyre. We put on the last clothes Geert van Dorp had brought us, simple woollen shifts and a tunic over those, high woollen stockings and boots. The horses would have to be kept separate in a pasture, but the animals had not been sick. Then, we returned on foot to the castle.

Everybody wept when we showed up at New Terhagen. Quintine and I acted as if we had been brother and sister. Wivine embraced her sister, and then she hugged me. We had been away from the castle for more than a month. Wivine must have realised what had happened between me and Quintine, but she said nothing. She embraced me as the others did, but she squeezed my hand more and kept me close to her.

\*\*\*\*\*

The group of people who had passed through the village of Niel had been flagellants. I heard later how hundreds of such flagellants had left the cities of Ghent, Bruges, Sluis and many more, roaming the county, whipping their backs to blood, walking half naked through the streets, converging on Tournai, the spiritual centre, and spreading the sickness of course even more.

The flagellants mostly grouped and walked from August to October of the year 1349. At the end of October, Pope Clement VI condemned the practice. He ordered the dispersal of the flagellant groups and their arrest. The groups had by then degenerated to roaming gangs of beggars and people who lived in debauchery. King Philip VI of France also outlawed the flagellants in November of 1349, forbade the gangs on penalty of death.

I might have encountered one of their last groups, who roamed at the edge of the kingdom and county. Gillis Vresele later told me the flagellants had also entered Ghent in great numbers, and attracted many adherents in the city. The aldermen of the city, horrified by the self-inflicted torture and the licentiousness of some of the men, had forbidden them in the beginning of 1350. I had met the remnants of their groups.

Quintine Denout and I survived the pestilence, although we got sick by it. Nobody at castle Terhagen got the sickness. By then we were strongly convinced that the sickness was not a

wave, and not a cloud. People spread it, by touching or by breathing near other people. Our strategy of isolation had worked, and we had survived because the Pharaïldis men had thought rationally on the information provided to us by the monk, Gerolf Vresele. Had we been so sure of what we thought now, we might have been able to save all the members of the Pharaïldis families. We should have stopped our activities and businesses for many months, but our families would have remained intact.

At Beoostenblijje, Heyla and the members of the de Smet family also survived. They did not suffer from the illness. Also Count Louis of Male survived, one of those men who were probably so powerful in body and spirit and so healthy the sickness could not hold him in its grip. Louis of Male complained he had lost some of his best counsellors in the patriarchs of the Pharaïldis families. We doubted, however, by that time already, he still needed counsellors at all. Only Gillis Vresele afterwards met regularly with the count, and gave him his best advice. Louis of Male continued to be very much in love with Heyla de Smet, but he found Beoostenblijje far. He began talking of building or buying a new castle for Heyla, and the name of Wondelgem, much closer to Ghent, slightly to the north of the *kuipe*, was often mentioned.

At the end of May of 1350, Wivine Denout, more radiant than ever, told me she was pregnant. I expressed joy. I spoke with Quintine about what I should do. Quintine ordered me to marry her sister. I protested, but she told me she was not pregnant and would never lay with me again if I did not honour Wivine.

Evrard Vresele married Wivine and me in the little chapel of New Terhagen. By then, most of the members of the Pharaïldis families who had stayed with me in New Terhagen, had returned to Ghent.

Quintine Denout rode often to the convent of Ter Hage in those months. I feared for a while she might want to become a nun, but when I told her that, she laughed me away and said nuns had to be virgins, which she was not. I knew.

Quintine too returned to Ghent. I settled with my wife in my castle, and began to develop grand plans for extending the land empire of the Vreseles on both sides of the Scheldt. I missed Quintine so much, and threw me head-on in my work.

## The Pharaïldis Evolution

At the beginning of the summer of 1350, the remaining, surviving members of the Pharaïldis families organised a formal meeting. It was the first meeting since more than a year, and almost a miracle the strong links between the families and the wish to continue working together had remained strong. Gillis Vresele had talked to the families separately, and concluded such a meeting had still much sense, even after the devastations of the pestilence. The meeting was to be held in his house of the *Kalanderberg*. We estimated it was safe by then to come together in Ghent. The sickness had not really returned to our city after the spring of 1350.

Of the Vresele family would be present Gillis Vresele and his sons Boudin and Evrard, with me, Jehan Vresele of Terhagen. Of the family of the goldsmiths, only John de Smet would come. Of the van Lake family only remained William van Lake, the deceased Raes's son

being too young. The fullers Denout would be represented by Pieter and Martin Denout. Of the de Hert family, John de Hert and his son Clais had agreed to attend. In all, we were with exactly ten remaining members, and some of us were still quite young. Boudin Vresele, the monk Evrard and I were in our early thirties, Martin Denout and Clais de Hert were barely twenty. Only John de Hert and Gillis Vresele were in their fifties, Pieter Denout in his late forties, John de Smet and William van Lake around forty. We had only two men left who might be called our patriarchs: Gillis Vresele and John de Hert.

Gillis Vresele opened the session. We sat around the table in Gillis's hall. Marie Vresele served, helped by Alise and Avezoete van Lake. The wine was sweet and, as usual, of the very best quality, but the mood in the hall was dark, very gloomy. Our families had been severely decimated by the great mortality. We felt many of the men were depressed, their energy spent, not very eager to pursue grand designs of enterprise.

Gillis Vresele began by reminding us of our beloved deceased, 'we must say a prayer for the members of our families who have passed away. They would have liked much to sit around this table with us, and discuss the issues of life. It could not be. I propose we all say the Our Father in silence, and think with affection and gratefulness of them, before we start our discussions. We dedicate this session to our memories of the great men who have not survived the ordeal.'

We bowed our heads, murmured the little prayer together, held a few moments of pause, and then we looked back to Gillis. We remarked how much Gillis was affected by the thoughts of his friends, the friends of his father too, the men who for the first time since many, many years, would not be with us.

Gillis straightened his back and continued, 'as usual, I propose we discuss the economical and the political situation during our meeting, and then how we can work together on concrete business initiatives'.

Gillis paused again, but nobody had any objection to how the meeting would proceed. Gillis sighed, and said, 'Ghent and Flanders have been terribly struck by the sickness. Hundreds of thousands of good people have died. Ghent has suffered around fifteen thousand dead. Can you imagine the catastrophe, and the suffering? Five thousand people or so must have died in Bruges and three thousand in Ieper, but the exact figures will probably never be known. No accounts have been held of the dead. Many have died in silence, in secret, in utter misery and poverty, and have been thrown in common tombs. It seems the pestilence has subsided in this spring and not returned in summer, but the disaster has been awful on the cities, in a scale unheard of. The people succumbed in such great numbers! I would have thought such catastrophe impossible before it happened. The countryside has been afflicted with horror, too! So many dead to mourn, my friends, will have a profound impact on our economy and on our ways of thinking about the world.'

Gillis held once more a deep silence.

He continued with, 'nevertheless, this is not the time to mourn and keep mourning. What is done cannot be undone. Ghent needs us, must see we, the Pharaïldis men, are at work and believe life goes on as before. That is the best service we can do to our city and to our friends. We cannot let Ghent go to pieces.'

I thought, 'life must go on, but what a beastly way to jump subjects desultorily. How little abstruse has Gillis become? Has he no feelings?'

'So, what is the economic situation in the county?' Gillis asked rhetorically. 'For us, merchants, some prices will rise dramatically, other prices may lower. We must remain

vigilant, and follow prices very closely. Since many people died in the countryside too, the wages of workers on the fields will rise, for fewer people will be available to till the land, to sow and to harvest. The crops will wait and many fields will lay fallow, for more hands are needed to sow and harvest than are available, so we may expect the prices of grain to rise steeply. For the same reasons, the price of English wool may go up, but so many weavers and fullers died, and since after *Goede Disendach* many weavers have left the town to find easier, less taxed work in England and Brabant, and since also many hundreds of weavers have been banished from Ghent by the count, more wool than can be processed may be presented in the draper's hall. This effect may lower the prices of wool, as the wool may not be sold or be sold more slowly. I believe, nevertheless, there will soon be a high demand for wool cloth, for much cloth has been destroyed and needs to be replenished in the houses of the wealthy, who have also not been hit so ferociously by the sickness as the poor. The making of tools may suffer, for there will be less craftsmen. The money should be in easy supply, as so many heads of families and their offspring have died.

The money has concentrated by heritage, so more rich people than before will be trying to lay their hands on fine products. The construction of houses will be very expensive, due to rising wages of the fewer journeymen and builders. A lot less new building will be going on, however, for many houses are standing empty. The value of real estate within Ghent will go down.

Where can we make the biggest profits? I think buying houses would be a fine investment, for prices are low now but are bound to rise again, giving some time. Grain and wool are still promising, though probably harder to get, wine and beer too. I am a little dubious about transport, for there will be far less goods to transport, but also fewer shippers will be on the rivers, for many have perished in the great mortality. I don't think, therefore, we should fundamentally change our businesses. The trade in all victuals will still be strong, investments in pastures, in salt pans and in peat should bring strong profits. We can discuss these trends some more, but first I would like to have us hear an announcement to be made by our friend William van Lake. He has something very important to communicate, which may affect us all!

We wondered what William van Lake had to say. He was the only survivor of an illustrious family, an extremely wealthy man after his heritage. He was the undisputed sole heir of the van Lake fortune.

Gillis Vresele sat in his chair, and William stood.

'My dear friends,' William began, weighing his words with care, 'I have been thinking ever since the terrible deaths my family suffered, about the way I had been living and the reasons of my being alive. It seemed to me I stood during this winter at a turning point. When my father and my brother died, I was left a very wealthy but a very lonely man. A sad, grieving, mourning man. I felt sharply then, that the deaths of my kin should not have happened in vain. I sought for signs given to me by God, and I found one. I always liked, I realised, the work doctors and nurses and barbers do in our city. I found such work of a noble nature. What nobler can there be than try to relieve people from pain and suffering and from mental distress? The last assistance for spiritual decay are provided by the priests and the monks. For relieve of physical pain and suffering in people, one must find a doctor. I have been left alone, with no sons to care for, with a daughter and a girl cousin who can better care for themselves than I can, and who may soon get married. Alise seems to like Clais de Hert, and Avezoete eyes Martin Denout, so my daughter and cousin shall leave my house for two fine, young men. Boudin, the son of my brother, is still a young boy. Women should take care of him during the next years. I would not be able to do that! I was searching for a sense to my life, and found none of substance in our Ghent. I have decided therefore to stop being a trader of

cloth. I shall also not return to our ancestral craft of weaving. I want to become a doctor, not just any doctor, but a very good doctor, one who studies the worst sicknesses, such as the pestilence that harassed us last year. I want to study at the most reputed school of medicine, at Montpellier. I have decided I will leave Ghent for a few years and become a doctor at Montpellier!

We looked at each other, astonished. One more important man in the Pharaïldis group would abandon us? Our group became poorer by the day!

William van Lake resumed, ‘I am very wealthy, but as a doctor it would be impossible for me to dedicate my time to the cloth trade. Still, I would like the van Lake money to grow and to serve my daughter, as well as my brother’s son and daughter. I talked this over with Gillis Vresele, and we arrived at some form of arrangement. I would like Gillis to explain the details of what we came up with.’

William sat down in his chair, Gillis once more stood.

‘One third of the heritage in money and investments of the van Lakes shall remain with William. He’ll use this money to pay for his studies, buy or rent a house in Montpellier, and pay for his living, until he can start practising as a doctor. William would like to return to Ghent after his studies, so I and my son Boudin will look over his fortune in Ghent. His daughter and cousins Avezoete and Boudin van Lake can remain living in the van Lake house of the *Brabantstraat*, for as long as they wish. Such is the express wish of William.

Another one third of the van Lake funds will be equally split between his three heirs, between Alise, Avezoete and Boudin. As to the remaining one third, William and I have worked out a special agreement. One third of the van Lake funds will be merged with the Vresele funds.

We have calculated our shares in the total sum. We have determined how much I own and how much William owns of the global amount. My son Boudin shall manage the total amount, and work at growing this total. The profits of the investments made with our total amount, shall be divided according to the respective shares of the Vresele family and the van Lake family in the total fortune.

For the next five years, in each year, Alise, Avezoete and Boudin will not be able to take more than one fifth of the profits, together. The rest of the profits will be added to the basis funds, so that the amount of money can augment. Each year, at the feast of Saint Pharaïldis, the men of the Vresele and of the van Lake families will meet together, to discuss whether our scheme has been profitable or not. No changes to the structure devised can be made in the next five years, except for by common consent of me, Gillis Vresele, and William van Lake.

As to the lands of the van Lake, and to their manors in the countryside, we have discussed a similar agreement! The lands, however, shall not be joined. Indeed, one manages not lands in the same way as one manages fluid money. Nevertheless, the lands of the Vreseles and of the van Lakes shall be managed by one person only, by Ser Jehan Terhagen. Jehan shall manage the estates of the Vreseles and of the van Lakes, but keep separate accounts over the properties and the revenues. The manors of the van Lakes shall be rented out, unless the members of the van Lake family would like to occupy the manors by themselves.’

I remained sitting at the table with open mouth. I had no idea how many fields and pastures the van Lakes possessed, but if they were really as rich as we all thought, I might well have to manage twice as much lands as I handled today! How was I going to cope with such vast responsibility?

‘We have still many details to work out,’ William added, ‘but this arrangement is what, basically, I agree to. It allows me to become a doctor, and I feel confident the van Lake money will well be cared for by Boudin Vresele in trading and by Jehan Terhagen in real estate. I have asked Gillis and Boudin to teach the management of funds and the craft of

trading to Boudin, Raes's son. With time, the two Boudins might assure the transition of the management form one to the other, when Boudin Vresele agrees, or we shall decide on some other scheme.'

John de Smet had been sitting at the table, frowning, considering, lost in thoughts. He now interrupted Gillis and William, saying, 'friends of the Pharaïldis, I would like to add my contribution to this scheme. I am a goldsmith and I love my craft. I am happy only when I can be together with my wife, or when I am working with gold thread. My father was an extraordinary man. He was a simple blacksmith, but he became a skilled goldsmith, and later on a money-changer and a trader. I do not have those last abilities and talents! I can trade all right, exert the craft of money-changing, but I derive no pleasure from it. I want to create! The wealth of my family has equally grown so much I have been asking myself what to do, for I cannot exercise two crafts at the same time: that of goldsmith and that of being a trader and a money-changer. My son, Wouter the Younger, has not proven the talent of a fine goldsmith, but he seems to genuinely like the business of money-changer, of lending money, and of handling coins. He is smart, has all the cunning needed to look for opportunities to work with ready money, but he has not the soul of a trader. I have thought of sending him to Bruges, to place him in apprenticeship with one of the great Florentine banking houses, with the Portinari or the Bardi or even the Medici, if they would accept him, or otherwise with one of our own, Flemish money handlers and bankers. I too have therefore an issue with part of my family's fortune.'

We waited for more. John held a slight pause, then he continued.

'Gillis Vresele, would you accept a large part of my fortune to be added to the pot you are setting up with William van Lake? I would agree to the same arrangements! When Wouter the Younger is of age, I may take some or all of that money back and give it to Wouter to start his own business.'

The men around the table began to whisper to neighbours. There was so much humming to be heard at the table, that Gillis and William had no occasion to answer immediately.

When the noise of the murmurs diminished, Pieter Denout and John de Hert, who sat next to each other, asked for silence and Pieter said, 'Gillis, I and John, here, we would also like to enter such a scheme. I am still a fuller, but I mostly manage my fullers' mills currently. I still know how to full, and I did full occasionally, mostly when Raes van Lake the Elder had need of very special quality cloth. My son, Martin, will never be a fuller. He was not born to that craft! He talked to me with much enthusiasm about what Jehan Terhagen was doing with lands and farms. He has been nagging me, lately, about asking Jehan to take him on as an apprentice. As to my own fortune, well, my fortune has grown so much I too have been breaking my head on how to manage it all! Manage vast funds, invest the money in trade ventures, with the amounts I would have to work with, is not really in my abilities. I fear my fortune would dwindle with time. I might make enormous mistakes. So, I would like to enter your scheme, too!'

John de Hert added, 'yes, and I am a shipper. I am standing at the same crossroads as Pieter Denout. I also would like to enter the scheme. My son Clais feels for Alise van Lake, so our fortunes will be linked soon, and we are already related to the Denouts by my sister Kerstin, Pieter's wife. I only ask for one thing: can my son Clais assist Boudin? Clais can manage the transports of the Pharaïldis. I then would be glad to join your arrangement, which would be a true global Pharaïldis agreement!'

Gillis Vresele and William van Lake were flabbergasted. Boudin Vresele and I sat mesmerised. The scheme imagined between two families, might in the end link all the Pharaïldis families into one grand enterprise!

Gillis Vresele remained silent for a long time, considering the offer.

Then he said, ‘so, if we do this, we put huge amounts of ready money into one pot, agree on the shares each of our families have of the pot, and then we hand over the pot to be managed by my son Boudin Vresele, assisted by young Wouter de Smet and Clais de Hert. We also put all our land properties together, determine which parcels belong to each family, and allow the lot to be managed by Jehan Terhagen, assisted by Martin Denout. We have a money-pot and a land-pot. The profits from the money-pot shall be distributed in part to the families, in part used to augment the pot, all in the right proportions. The land-pot augments with fields, pastures and other lands bought from their revenue.

This agreement must be detailed on parchment, my friends, and we must also agree on some form of payment for the services provided by our managers. Can we do that in the form of a percentage of the benefits to all of our families, inciting them thus to work harder?’

The men laughed and applauded at that fine joke, but Boudin and I looked a little sour.

‘I suggest we write in the same contract a committee oversees the pots and how the manager teams will be controlled. This committee should have the last say on important investments. It should be a committee that determines the policies of working but does not exert actual management. We may call the committee the Pharaïldis Committee. Member of the committee cannot be the managers, for they are the ones the committee must control, but the managers must be invited to the sessions. I propose as members of the committee myself for the Vresele family, John de Smet for that family and Alise van Lake for the van Lake family, because William will be at Montpellier. Also Pieter Denout and John de Hert, in all no more than five members. There will be a woman in the committee. Boudin van Lake is too young. I agree with having Alise in the committee. Does somebody object?’

The Pharaïldis men shook their heads. No, they knew Alise, thought of her as of a very sensible woman, and they agreed with the arrangement.

John de Hert remarked, ‘we shall have to determine the shares in the lots, the distribution of revenue, of profits. There will be extras, modifications, added contributions, withdrawals of money and lands, as well as increase of funds and property. The accounts of such an enterprise will be complex. Every movement of land and money must be recorded, for if we don’t do that, we will not be friends for long. Money leads to disputes, unless the figures are right. We shall have to refer to someone who can show us the right figures, be the arbiter of disputes, and follow the transactions with care. We could either ask Heinric Vresele, the clerk, or my sister Nete to hold the accounts.’

Gillis Vresele shook his head quickly, ‘not my Heinric! I wouldn’t trust him with such work. He has his job at the city administration, and that should be enough for him. I have full confidence in Nete. She is utterly honest, good with figures, meticulous, and she has great presence of mind. She has a strong personality, great clout. How about adding Quintine Denout to assist her?’

‘I am not convinced Quintine will accept,’ Pieter Denout warned. ‘She agrees well with Nete, and she is a serious and smart girl, but I don’t know. I’ll have to ask her.’

Pieter Denout avoided my surprised glance. How many people knew of my feelings for Quintine?

‘Fine, you do that, Pieter, insist,’ Gillis concluded. ‘We have in this way formed an entirely new structure, my friends, a group of people acting effectively as one person. The two enterprises shall be managed by a small group of people who will have to work together as one, like a consort group of musicians who together produce a harmonious tune of music. We

hereby found a consort or consortium, the Pharaïldis Consortium, with managers and a control committee, and a separate group responsible for the accounts. Do not women generally control our households? Yes, Nete de Hert will be our bookkeeper, our keeper of accounts. She will be up to her task.

The body we created will decide for enormous wealth! The Pharaïldis Consortium shall wield means no family of Ghent possesses! We shall have to be careful, friends. Such wealth, and hence such power, will almost inevitably attract envy, hatred, competition and enmity. Our consortium must remain secret. We must not let the other families of Flanders enter into our agreement. The Pharaïldis committee will not only have to make sure our fortunes are increased, but also that those fortunes are not squandered by the managers, even though we love them since they are our sons and daughters. Our power should also not be used to harm other people, and not be used to build up political power. We must pray God the Pharaïldis Consortium to be a positive force, not a negative one, not one that creates tension in our community. We must always keep in mind the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ! Pray, my friends, and let Evrard, our priest and monk, who should have a place of observation at our committee meetings, always watch out for glitches in our decisions, and warn us when we might be tempted into misusing our means. We do the work of God, not of the devil!

When the name of Evrard was thus mentioned, the monk scraped his throat, indicating he too wanted to add a few words. Was he not the conscience of the group?

He told, ‘I would like to give you two observations on what I just heard. First, the structure you proposed, an organisation or association with managers of family funds, controllers of accounts and managers who do their best to augment your fortunes, is, of course, fully constituted by members of our families. In the future, I hope you realise, it shall not always have to be so. You shall want at all times the control committee, as you call it, to be constituted of members of the families, but the managers do not necessarily have to come from these same families! The managers need to be men, or women, with very specific talents for such stringent work. In the future, you, or your descendants, might look for such specific talents in other families. I would like to add my amazement at how the group you have founded has been derived out of the necessity, created by the pestilence. I suppose other such novel institutions, views, and so on, might mark the ending of the sickness.

Second, you are with the structure you will found entirely dedicated to augmenting your fortunes, for the sake of such growth. You don’t need all the wealth you have amassed to feed your families, which was the real reason why you all desired to build up reserves. Of course, of course, you still need reserves, for God only knows what the future may hold in stock as calamities. The vicissitudes of life, wars, sicknesses, crimes, the Lord knows which other catastrophes, may yet hurt us. Nevertheless, the fortunes and lands and farms and houses and manors and even castles you own have such a value as to amount to a lot more than the reserves you might ever need. Your diversification in investments, in trade and in real estate in Ghent and in the countryside, it seems to me, is a sufficient means of forming a business and a trade that is immune to all sorts of catastrophes that might befall on Flanders and on Ghent. I see that you, my friends, are increasingly dedicated to ever augmenting your fortune for money’s sake. I warn you, feeling responsible for your spiritual salvation, such accumulation may not find joy and agreement in God’s eyes.

The messages given to us by Our Lord’s son, Jesus Christ, tell clearly it is very difficult for a wealthy man to enter God’s realm! Blessed are the poor, said Jesus, be on your guard against avarice. Life does not consist in possessions! Invite the poor, the crippled and the lame at your table, said the Lord. Jesus told it was easier for a camel to walk through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. These messages given to us by Jesus, tell clearly it is very difficult for a wealthy man to enter God’s realm!

I propose you think also about the teachings and the values of our heavenly Lord. You share enormous wealth within your families. You might share part of your richness with your brothers and sisters outside the circle of your families, and foremost with the poor.’

Gillis answered, ‘we pay taxes, many taxes, Evrard, to contribute to the community. Nevertheless, I believe you are right. Thank you for reminding us of our religion and of our duties of charity. I propose we set aside one tenth of what we gain and offer that to the church. Would you be our advisor to help us indicate which institutions of the poor could be best served with our money and estates? Our gifts must be secret, anonymous, to find pleasure in the eyes of God. We also would not want our money spent on silver and gold regalia for the abbots or bishops. The money must go directly to the poor, or to institutions that care for the poor, institutions we can trust.’

‘I would be delighted to advise you,’ Evrard said, beaming.

‘Not just advise, manage too,’ Gillis icily replied, forcing with hard eyes this argument into Evrard.

‘I already have a candidate abbey,’ I declared. ‘The convent of Ter Hage has done a wonderful work for the sick. Many nuns died in the effort. The abbess, Mother Amalberga, needs help. I suggest you go and see her, Father Evrard.’

Evrard nodded.

‘So do the nuns of the Bijloke, and their hospital,’ William van Lake added. ‘And is there also not a certain abbey in the town of Zele who should need your attention?’

Gillis Vresele did not react on these words. I had no idea why William referred to an obscure abbey in a village I hadn’t even really heard of, but I remembered Gillis having mentioned to me once his ancestry had its origins in that town. I did not pursue the argument further.

\*\*\*\*\*

‘Our business discussion largely finished,’ Pieter Denout continued, ‘what shall be our views on the way Ghent and Flanders are governed? I have to admit to you I remain very suspicious about the current aldermen of Ghent. The ancient lineages, the aristocratic families, are back in power. We are ruled once more by the same people from the same families as long before, by knights, by men who originated in families that in the past pursued mostly and almost exclusively their own, particular interests, not the interests of all the *poorters* of the city. They certainly keep not in mind the interests of the craftsmen and of the merchants!’

‘True,’ John de Hert concurred. ‘I agree! I would like more men from the crafts in the government of the town. I doubt very much the Bettés, the Borluuts, Dammans, de Gruterés, de Tolleneeres, the Rijnvisches and the Soyssones to serve us well. I believe our aim should be to have more men from the guilds in the council of aldermen. The *Grote Collatie*, the council of aldermen and deans, should have more representatives from the common *poorters*. I am not in favour of our direct involvement in the choice of leaders, however. We had one such experiment with James van Artevelde, an experiment that was beneficial to our trade, but not to our man. Such extreme is not prone to repetition. We should state out opinion, promote a fairer part of all the inhabitants in the government of the cities, nothing more.’

The Pharaïldis men nodded.

‘Do we not already support Count Louis of Male with special advice?’ I asked, not without a trace of sarcasm in my voice, for I esteemed Louis did what he had in his mind and did not listen much to wise advice.

‘We did indeed,’ Gillis Vresele took the challenge. ‘We should talk about that support. I agree we should advise Count Louis to the best of our abilities, and tell our truth. We are not for

flattering. We should not betray the values we stand for. We are advisors, and not necessarily supporters or followers. We stand for free trade in our lands, for equal justice for all and whatever the class of people, for honesty in government, for political equality, for protection against the arbitrary in justice, for security of persons and properties, for the suppression of unfair taxes that crush people and trade and crafts, for mutual respect among all *poorters*, for the freedoms of the towns to determine their fate and their justice. The count must swear to uphold our freedom charters, and only then do we accept authority over our territory. We are against absolute power exercised by one person or by a group of persons. In other words, we do not tolerate dictatorship or oligarchy. We do believe commoners can be as intelligent and industrious as the knights and lords, and any man has its dignity that must be preserved.'

Gillis waited a while at that point. He was lost in thoughts for quite a long moment, no doubt reflecting on what I had launched.

'We have an issue, my friends of the Pharaïldis, with our advice to Louis of Male!' he continued. 'The count harboured fine ideals when he was still a boy. We see him evolving rapidly. He may still believe in fine ideals, but he seems increasingly to feel he alone can realise those ideals, and his ideals are his views only. He shoves out of his way all the people who do not think as he does. So far, he has worked in the interests of all, but he has proved vindictive, very vindictive, on his opponents. His views evolve, and he gets more and more used to wielding power. Currently, he discards much advice. In the future, I believe he will not ask for advice at all. That is my experience from the meetings of his council I attended to. We should continue giving advice when asked to do so, but we should not have many illusions on our influence. Like we did with James van Artevelde, we must start keeping a distance between the count and us. There is already less and less opportunity for us to influence him, anyway. He probably still means well, but his power is growing, his assurance also, his self-esteem too, as well as his obstinacy. He has become a much more powerful figure than the previous count. He had it easier, of course. There is no van Artevelde to challenge his authority, and the cities are subdued. The pestilence has killed the last resistance to him. He succeeds better in playing out one party or class of people against the other than his father did, and he is a lot more charming, often seeking consensus, as long as his views are more or less supported.'

'He is not a very happy man,' I tried to defend Count Louis a little. 'His wife has had miscarriages. He only just had his first legal daughter born, little Margaret of Male. She is already the prey of speculations of marriage, the poor girl. Louis of Male's marriage is not a happy one. He has Heyla, of course, and he seems to love Heyla genuinely. His issues with a male heir are not with him, for Heyla is fertile and has given him a robust son and a fine daughter. We should also pity the man. He curbs under considerable stress. He did install a council in which common men of Flanders give him counsel, so he does not merely listen to his court knights. He is working at providing better and more equal justice for all men of Flanders.'

'The power he seeks worries me,' Gillis interrupted me. 'Even for the best of reasons, he seeks power. Has he any fundamental values he truly believes in? His first and foremost value is, not unlike his father's, absolute authority over his county! I am afraid he has not learned to hear what others have to say. Does he admit others may have ideas that are not like his own? He becomes more inflexible by the day, whereas we, in the cities, thrive on the clash of ideas and opinions.'

'He is still our count,' I objected, 'and it is our duty to help him becoming a wise man.'

'That we shall have to do,' Gillis concluded, 'as long as he does not think he is the only wise man in Flanders.'

We left our meeting at that. We ate and drank in Gillis's house, and then we returned to our homes. Gillis and I continued to discuss our issue. We decided to add the statements of our values in the document that would constitute the agreement for the consortium. I slept in the *Kalanderberg*, where I still had a room.

## Terhagen

When the documents of the Pharaïldis Consortium had been prepared in final form, nicely written on parchment, copied and signed, William van Lake departed for Montpellier. We said goodbye to him when he rode off from his house in the *Brabantstraat*. His daughter and cousin, Alise, Avezoete and Boudin, would remain to live there while he was away. Avezoete promised to take good care of Boudin. William rode to Sluis, where he would find a place on a cog of John de Hert bound for Bordeaux. He would try to sail even more to the south, closer to the Pyrenees, and then travel by horse to Montpellier. If that road were too dangerous, he could sail all around Iberia, to very near the town.

We were all very sad William left us, especially since our families had lost so many dear ones to the sickness, but the quest of William was noble, and we admired him for it.

William left early at dawn. We would not see him back for many years. William also said goodbye to his home town of Ghent, but he did not waver and rode.

Before the summer was over, we celebrated the marriage of Clais de Hert with Alise van Lake. Their marriage was concluded in Ghent. They were both very young, but eager to marry. The van Lake complex needed a man in the household, so John de Hert finally agreed on the wedding. The banquet organised the same day as the holy mass, was a boisterous affair, held, as had become a tradition in the Pharaïldis families, in a large tent placed in the *Bijloke* field. Most of the aldermen, clerks and deans of Ghent had been invited, as well as a large company of friends and acquaintances. The wine flowed generously, beer was poured in huge quantities, the singing was merry, and John de Hert spared no money on the finest food dishes Ghent could provide.

The banquet and the dances in the *Bijloke* field were a happy event. I found myself unable to share fully in the joyous mood. I remained rather gloomy in those months of 1350. I was married to Wivine, who had accompanied me to the wedding banquet. Wivine was a nice girl, very kind and tender with me, loving, affectionate, a lusty girl, devoted to her new home, to the castle of Terhagen. She took pride in our manor. The servants and people of Old Terhagen soon came under her charm and spell. I was sure they would have defended Wivine to the bitter end. The children loved her, the women had no issue talking to her about the work, and Wivine developed a fine sense of solidarity with the women de Wilde, de Handscoemakere and van Noortkerke, the wives of the guards. She also became friends with the van Dorps in the farm of Old Terhagen. I should have been very proud and content with such a wife, and lived the happy, quiet years of a housefather and lord of a domain.

Why is it that God never allows his people to enjoy their happiness completely? Why is there always something that withholds us from being totally content? I scorned myself for being too nervous, restless, a man never satisfied by the simple joys. In my case, the image of another woman, a woman probably not so beautiful and loving as Wivine was, hung constantly as an indelible drawing in my mind. When I looked, stared and studied Wivine's face, I slimmed

certain volumes, took the rounding of some of her curves, and then I saw Quintine! Not one day could I go out riding and not think of Quintine! The name of Quintine meant hearing my personal curse. The name was synonym for lack of fulfilment and lack of happiness. I had much, but I wanted more.

I noticed Quintine at the wedding banquet, but dared not approach her. Wivine must have sensed what was going on in my mind, have understood why I could not simply be happy, why I never really opened to her, never spontaneously caressed her, laughed and showed with loving eyes how beautiful she was. She said nothing, contented with what she could have of me. She was pregnant, of course. Wivine had announced that to me immediately after Quintine and I had returned to New Terhagen. I had wanted to tell Wivine our sleeping together had been a mistake, a mistake that could be undone, but those words stuck in my throat when she whispered the news of her pregnancy to me.

Alise van Lake and Clais de Hert were marrying in glorified happiness. Why could I not be happy? Had I deserved to be unhappy? Utterly bored and disgusted by the great, innocent joy around me, I walked from our table and went to talk to Martin Denout. We should start working together, I wanted to say to him. God knows I could use a good assistant! I had acquired so many fields by then, I could hardly memorise where all the lands lay, whether they were used correctly as pastures or as fields, and whether farms covered them all. I wondered whether all the farmers I managed provided me with the right figures for revenue. I hated being stolen from! Geert van Dorp did his best, but he was getting older, and we needed better accounting of our possessions. I had begun copying a map I had found in Ghent of the region from Axel to Antwerp. I placed the lands the Pharaïldis families owned in colours on that map, and placing stars for our farms. I could only visualise where all the lands were situated approximately by this map. I was now looking to buy still more polders on the eastern banks of the Scheldt, some in Brabant country. My main issue was in getting enough journeymen and their families to place on the farms. This task took much of my precious time. Van Dorp helped, though.

Martin sat at another table, but he danced much around with Avezoete van Lake at rapid rhythms. I caught up with him when he was fetching beer for his table. Martin was not a wine drinker.

I caught him at the shoulders, turned him around, ‘Martin! I am glad to have found you, finally! We must talk! I have work for you!’

‘Yes,’ he replied, somewhat embarrassed. ‘I should already have come to New Terhagen. I did once, but you were out for several days, Wivine told me. Yes, we should talk.’

He stood in front of me with two large jugs of beer in his hands. He placed the jugs on the corner of a table.

‘I would like you to return to Terhagen,’ I insisted. ‘I need an assistant urgently. If you still like the work I do, I can teach you. There is some administration to start with, but otherwise the life around Axel can be vigorous. Open air rides, and so on, meeting new friends. What do you think? You can stay with me and Wivine at Terhagen!’

‘Well, you know, in fact,’ Martin grumbled, reddening, ‘I have been helping Quintine to be installed in her manor. She desires to leave Ghent. You know how it is these days. It was hard to find servants and workmen. Avezoete has helped her too. Avezoete may move in with Quintine.’

‘And so you shall soon marry Avezoete?’

‘Not so quickly!’ Martin objected, grinning. ‘We plan to get married sometime next year, but first I would like to do something else.’

‘Oh, and what is that?’

‘This year is a papal jubilee year for all men and women of our faith. It is a great year of indulgences for all pilgrims who visit Rome this year, and only this year of 1350. Pilgrims to Rome in the *annus jubileus* receive plenary indulgence for their sins! I would like to travel to Rome, therefore, and I hoped to come to your assistance after that journey, around the end of the year, hopefully, and then I and Avezoete might live with Quintine in her manor. It is not far from New Terhagen, as no doubt you know.’

I was amazed! No, I didn’t know where Quintine resided. No such manor had been communicated in my list! I had thought her in Ghent. I had also not thought of Martin as being a particularly zealous Christian. Martin was a nice man, who wouldn’t have hurt a mouse. What sins might a young man like he have on his conscience? On the risk of being very naïve, I was certain he had committed none! Nevertheless, I would have to respect his choice. I sighed. Geert van Dorp and I would have to work yet harder to cope. We were left alone with the bulk of the work of absorbing the Pharaïldis estates and Martin would return when all the work had been finished.

I said, more disappointed than I wanted him to know, ‘I understand, Martin. I will not try to withhold you from such a pious enterprise. Don’t worry, then, I’ll manage. Don’t wait too long, however, to return. When do you intend to leave? Do you travel alone? Is Avezoete coming with you?’

‘No, not Avezoete,’ he said. ‘We intend to depart about two weeks from today. No, I’ll not travel alone. Evrard Vresele joins us with two other monks of the Fremineuren, as well as two friends of mine from Ghent, and also Quintine, my sister. Avezoete has still to care for young Boudin.’

My heart stopped.

‘Quintine?’ I exclaimed, ‘but such a voyage is dangerous! You’ll have to travel to regions in which bandits roam, on roads infested with renegades, on seas infested by pirates!’

He laughed.

‘No, no, no,’ Martin shook his head. ‘No, we do not want to travel over land. We discussed our plans with John de Hert. We’ll travel by boat, always following the coast. John can put us on a ship bound for La Rochelle. From there on we will have to hire another ship for Bordeaux or Bayonne, and then a Spanish ship for Barcelona. We hope to get another ship there to Marseille, or directly to Rome. No, we want to travel by sea, along the coasts. John de Hert has made inquiries, and those routes are the safest. We have it all figured out. We can stay in Franciscan abbeys, too, all along our route.’

I said, ‘oh, you have it all marked out, then!’

I was sure I made a very sour face, for all of this had been going on behind my back!

‘Such a voyage may be very hard on a woman,’ I remarked.

‘Quintine is very strong and healthy. We’ll put a monk’s cope on her, Jehan. The trip will not be harder on her than on us. I’m sorry! We wanted to tell you all about it one of these days. You seem to be as busy as we have been!’

‘Yes, I have,’ I agreed, as last word. ‘Well, I’ll let you bring your beer, then. Take care with those jugs!’

‘I almost forgot,’ Martin laughed, and hurried away.

I was left standing like a fool with my cup of wine in my hands. One of these days, I would stand like this while Quintine announced me she was going to marry someone else. I was pretty sure my life would end, then. I drank. My heart thumped. Who was I to impose anything on Quintine, to withhold her from doing what she wanted? Had I not married

Wivine? I saw Evrard walk a little further, admiring the dances, slapping in his hands and tapping his feet at the rhythm. He turned and laughed. He had no right to laugh! I felt very miserable. Quintine was leaving me! She would be travelling with Martin and two friends of his, no doubt two young men, knights maybe. I went over to Evrard.

‘Hi, Evrard,’ I began. ‘Martin told me you would travel to Rome, soon. What is this all about the jubilee year? What is so special about it? Sins can be forgiven in Ghent, too. Is this really a good time to sail to Rome, so soon after the great mortality?’

Evrard looked at me with much assurance and some pity. I supposed he knew all about me and Quintine. I felt the whole world was conspiring against me, making me feel miserable!

‘The jubilee year or *annus jubileus*,’ Evrard explained, ‘is a year of plenary indulgence for anybody who travels this year to Rome. However blackened one’s soul may be, Jehan, after having seen the grandeur of Rome and visited the holy places of Saint Peter, one shall return with a clean soul, a white soul, all one’s sins forgiven. Who has never sinned, in deeds, words or thoughts, Jehan? This year is only the second time ever the pope has decreed such a year. The first Christian jubilee happened in the year 1300, instituted by Pope Boniface VIII. It was a year of remission, of universal pardon. Pope Boniface proposed jubilee years to be held every one hundred years, but Pope Clement VI of Avignon has decreed a new one, this year, also, I suppose, to thank God the pestilence is almost spent. Bridget of Sweden, a noble woman who founded a large abbey, insisted to the pope to hold a jubilee year after the pestilence. She will travel to Rome too, to propose her new order of nuns, there. It is true that a jubilee only very hundred years would allow only few people to profit from it, and not every generation. One has to visit four churches of Rome to gain the jubilee, so that is what we are going to do.’

‘Oh! And you think the journey is not dangerous for a woman? You are taking Quintine with you, I heard! Why not Avezoete van Lake?’

‘Avezoete has to care for her brother, young Boudin, Jehan. Otherwise, she would have joined us. Don’t worry about Quintine! We’ll look after her, all right. As we near Rome, our company shall grow. It will be a most interesting voyage, and safe for Quintine, I assure you!’

‘I do not doubt that,’ I shouted back, over the loud music. ‘I am worried about Quintine. She is my sister-in-law, you know!’

‘That is what she is, Jehan. But she is a lot more to you, isn’t she, Jehan? Do you think my eyes are in my socks? Let her loose, Jehan. She deserves some happiness too! You are married to a fine woman. Enjoy life with your wife!’

I could not remain polite after this entreaty. Evrard had no right to mingle in my affairs. I turned on my heels and went back to the tables, to look for Quintine. She was dancing with a nice young fellow, one of the kind who might be looking for a girl to seduce and marry. Seeing this enraged me even more, then made me feel once more the most miserable man on earth. When Quintine had finished dancing I went up to her, before she could sit down, to some amazement in the people at the table. I grabbed her arm.

‘Quintine, I need to talk to you. Now! I have to discuss an urgent matter with you. Can we go to some quieter place?’

From out of a corner of my eyes I saw Wivine’s looks following me in alarm, but I cared no longer. Quintine went with me to a corner of the tent. We went outside. Wivine couldn’t see us from where she sat.

‘Quintine,’ I began, ‘I just heard you want to go on a pilgrimage to Rome!’

I blurted this out, in a quite excited voice.

‘I don’t want you to travel so far, Quintine! Such a journey is dangerous!’ I continued.

‘Is the journey dangerous or do you not want me to go because you think you own me?’

‘Both,’ I gnarled back. ‘You bewitched me, Quintine, I am obsessed by you. I grant you all of that. I love you. I don’t care whether the church may tell me it is adultery to declare this. I love you, do you hear? I beg you to stay!’

‘I won’t stay, Jehan! I can’t stay! I need some distance between me and you. I need to think. I am my own master! I can do as I feel and desire. You cannot stop me.’

‘Do you still feel anything for me?’

Quintine began to cry, which was very embarrassing, for other couples walked not far from us. Tears rolled from Quintine’s eyes.

‘Of course I love you, you rotten dumbass! Of course I love you. Would I want to flee far away if I didn’t love you? How do you think I feel to know you with my sister? You lie in bed with my twin sister, not with me, you bastard! You’ll have her children, not mine! What torture do you think this means to me? Leave me alone, Jehan, please, allow me to go on this voyage in peace. I need to think more serenely. I need to pray to God in a place close to Him on what I should do about my love for you and for my sister. I don’t know what can come out of my voyage. Let me loose for a while, give me a chance, I beg you!’

‘A chance to lose you?’ I cried, ‘why should I grant you such a chance? You are making us both miserable. I want to hold on to you, Quintine, at whatever cost!’

‘You shouldn’t. Please, Jehan, think with a gentler mind! You are a kind man, an honest man, a tolerant man. Give me a chance to ask God in the most holy of places what I should do! I am so confused, Jehan!’

Quintine wept, hot tears rolled over her cheeks. I wanted to slap my face to come to my senses. I had no right to withhold Quintine! She should decide in peace and quiet about her life. I had no right to force her into something beyond her own wish. How egoistic my love was! I should gain control over myself.

‘All right, all right, Quintine, all right! You voyage to Rome, come back, and tell me what you want. I’ll wait patiently. I’ll tell you what I want, now. I want you at my side. If necessary and otherwise not possible, I’ll tell Wivine what happened to us. I don’t want to hurt her, and yes, she’ll be the mother of a child by me, but when you come back, I’ll either tell Wivine how matters stand, or we’ll hide, seek the days and nights we can be together as they come, however rare. I can live in adultery and hiding if I have to. I don’t think my feelings will change with time. Not even if your feelings change! So, you travel to Rome, and find your way, and come back to me to make me happy or miserable, but please, come back in good health! Take good care of you!’

With that, I left Quintine standing against the linen of the tent. She wept, wiping at her eyes with her sleeve. I went slowly back into the tent, looked at the dancing, then to my table, and I went to sit next to Wivine. Wivine had seen me leave with Quintine. She asked me nothing.

Two weeks later, Quintine and her escort of six men, left Ghent. They too, like William, would first ride to Sluis. I brought Wivine to Ghent to say goodbye, but I pretended urgent business, not to have to suffer the pain of seeing Quintine leave. Yes, I hid from her. Maybe she was grateful. I was disgusted with myself. Was I a hard man, impolite, a coward, a rude and stupid man, or had I done the right thing? Bitterness welled up from my heart.

I probably made the two women I loved most, Quintine and Wivine, very miserable that day. Afterwards, when Wivine and I had returned to New Terhagen, I tried to be nice to her, but I was also very occupied with my work, alone as I was to supervise over vast territories of lands that were quite dispersed over the Four Crafts and the Land of Waas, although all lying to the north of Ghent. I returned only seldom to my city.

I hoped to make another woman a little happy then, the abbess of the convent of Ter Hage. Boudin Vresele had told me in Ghent how much money we could propose for charity this year, more specifically to the abbess. Evrard had disappeared on his pilgrimage, so we could dispose of the funds as we wished. Boudin asked no questions, and we arranged how the abbess could use the funds. We discussed for a certain, a high percentage of the total amount available, but that would still be an amount that would almost seem a miracle – I hoped – to a poor convent of nuns in a remote place of the county.

On one of my next travels to the countryside, I therefore rode to Ter Hage and asked to see the abbess. Mother Amalberga, about my own age but with early wrinkles of worries and of a hard life around the eyes, received me pleasantly enough. She had a neighbour on visit! Amalberga offered me a cup of wine, but preferred a glass of milk herself. I asked her how she was doing.

‘We survive,’ the abbess sighed. ‘When I became abbess, I thought life would be much simpler. We lost four nuns out of five in the sickness. Our grief was immense. I still feel depressed and so very lonely about the friends I lost. The nuns who died should be canonised to saints, you know, Ser Jehan. We nursed hundreds of sick men and women, but few of them lived on. I dare to hope we relieved some of their spiritual pain and physical pain, but the strain of watching so many good people die without being able to cure them, has exhausted us. Our joy has gone! Now, we must think again of our abbey. The people still need us, now more than ever. In the abbey, barns must be rebuilt, our cattle must be replenished, and we must think again about how to serve the community of Axel and the surrounding villages best.’

I interrupted her at that point, saying, ‘one of my dearest friends, a man called William van Lake, has suffered many dead relatives too in his family. He is the son of a wealthy family of drapers of Ghent, but he has left the city and his few remaining friends, to travel to the school of medicine at Montpellier. He wants to study there, become a doctor. He hopes to find remedies to cure the sick, and maybe discover new ways of helping the sick. We pray he succeeds in realising his dream. He has left his fortune in other hands to study medicine.’

‘I am so glad, Ser Jehan, that God has still placed such people among us. If you ever write to him, please give him our warmest blessings. Our thoughts will be with him, and we will pray for him. Now, what can I do for you? You are not just on a neighbourly visit, are you not?’

‘I rather came to do something for you, Mother Amalberga,’ I told. ‘I have a group of friends, men and women from Ghent, in five families. Suffice to say the men are traders. They prefer to remain unknown, but we decided together to put a certain amount of money at your disposal. We don’t know how much in all we can contribute to your convent, and some years there may not be enough money at all, but for this year, exceptionally, we can offer you about two thousand pounds groot.’

I had to stop talking at that point, for I feared Mother Amalberga succumbed to a heart attack. She pushed both her hands to her face and seemed to choke.

I worried, ‘Mother, are you all right? Should I call one of your sisters? Have a drink, please! Calm yourself!’

Amalberga began to cough, but thereby emerged out of her choking. She breathed much and excitedly, then. She drank indeed from her milk, and made wide eyes at me.

I continued, ‘I don’t have the money with me, Mother. The funds are deposited in Ghent. A woman, called Nete de Hert, I’ll give you her address, shall release the money to you. It would be best if you could talk to her, face to face. She is willing to come here, but it would be simpler for you to go and see her. I can take you, of course. As I understood, you can spend money on things you want to buy or on religious works of charity you would wish to

organise. You should hand a letter, closed and sealed with the abbey's badge to her, and Nete shall pay the men you send her with such a letter. Or you can take up the money in coins, but I would dissuade you from doing so. It is less safe. Nete shall only pay closed and sealed envelopes, not opened letters. I am also quite willing to bring you smaller amounts, as you need, say every two or three months. Think about it, Mother, we can arrange something that suits us all.'

'Good gracious, good gracious, praised be the Lord,' Amalberga could whisper, and she repeated those words a few times before she could say something that made more sense.

'God has heard my prayers! We have no money anymore, Ser Jehan! All is gone! We were once rich, but part of our money was stolen, the rest we spent in helping the sick and the poor. We are starving. We haven't eaten a piece of meat or fish in weeks. We live from what we have in the garden, and from what the good people of Axel bring us. We are so poor! God is giving us a sign, Ser Jehan! Our work pleases Him! I am so grateful! You bring us miraculous news!'

I smiled and placed a large saddle-purse on the table. The coins in the sack clang.

'I brought about three hundred groot with me, Mother Abbess. I dared not bring more for fear of thieves on the roads. This should help you get along for some time!'

The abbess did not dare to touch the coins. I saw tears in her eyes. Why did I tear water from the eyes of all the women I liked? A long time passed, before Amalberga looked at me again. She hesitated, but then said, 'a woman came to see me, a lovely and nice lady. She was from Ghent. Quintine Denout was her name. She was very sad. We talked, and I comforted her a little. I wished she would find solace and hope. I am confident the Lord has taken her in his protection.'

So, one more person knew about my relations to Quintine!

I said, rather calmly, 'I hope so too, Mother. Quintine Denout has left the county of Flanders. She has embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome with her brother Martin and a man I call my uncle, the priest and Fremineuren monk Evrard. They should return within a year or so. The pope has decreed a jubilee year, you know! That is why Quintine is on her way to Rome.'

'Good, fine, excellent,' Amalberga sighed and murmured. 'In the jubilee year, total remission of sins is promised. I believed this woman was without sins, though. Sins of love are not sins, they cannot be!'

I remarked then how beautiful the abbess could be in fine ladies' clothes. She only showed me her face enveloped in her veils, but I could see how luxurious her hair might have been around the face. I refrained from making worldly compliments. Amalberga lowered her eyes. Suddenly, she brought her glance back to me.

'Ser Jehan, there is something I almost entirely forgot! The convent of Ter Hage was quite connected with your family of the manor of Ter Hage! I suppose you know that. You yourself were given in our custody for a while, and studied here. I know that from my predecessor mother, who heard it from her previous abbess. What the mothers didn't tell me, but what I found when I searched the convent for the last valuable silver or gold or anything else of value to be sold, was that the lords of Ter Hage, your parents or relatives, gave in our keeping a large wooden chest. The chest is closed with iron locks and with very sturdy, heavy, sturdy slabs of iron. I know of no keys for that chest. I also did not otherwise try to pry it open. It is extremely heavy. I could not heave it from the floor. The chest is still in one of our attics, where the sisters placed it very many years ago. Whenever you want to fetch it, the chest is yours!'

‘Thank you, mother. If it is so heavy, I cannot take it with me for now. I shall come back with a cart and a few men to load it into the cart, and to bring it to New Terhagen. Thank you for the care.’

‘Don’t mention it, it was a pleasure.’

Mother Amalberga waved my thanks away.

We spent an agreeable afternoon together, and I slept that night in the convent, in a small but comfortable little room in the modest guest house of the convent.

We ate together and talked, but Mother Amalberga did not refer to Quintine Denout anymore, though a great fire burnt in me to hear more. I gave her news about Ghent. She explained me who I could trust in Axel, and who I could not. I left Ter Hage early the next morning. Mother Amalberga would travel on her own to Ghent, to Nete de Hert.

While I rode, one idea only turned in my head and drove me mad. Quintine would go to Rome and ask for remission of her sins, her sins having been she slept with the husband of her sister. She would come back to Ghent with a clean, pure soul as white as linen. If she wanted then to preserve her clean soul, she might refuse seeing me ever again!

\*\*\*\*\*

I tried to be as busy as possible, chasing the image of Quintine from my thoughts, failing badly. I feverishly entered new ventures around Axel. Some of the lords were still willing to sell me land. I looked now for opportunities to link my possessions together into one coherent whole.

I also invested much money in the salt panning around the town, expecting to find a good market for the excellent, tasty salt in Ghent. I bought a lot of the herrings Axel was famous for, had some brought to Ghent, and some to Antwerp and Brussels.

I dug out more peat than Gillis Vresele had ever done. We sold bricks. The winter of from 1349 to 1350 had been very cold and humid, but in the times of the sickness most transport between Ghent and Axel had stopped. I began to ship large quantities of peat now, once again, to Ghent. We were the almost only ones to have entered this business once more. Reserves had to be replenished in Ghent. We sold well! John de Hert opened the waterways, rivers and channels between Axel, Zelzate and Ghent, so we transported a steady supply of salt, herring and peat to Ghent. We also began transporting peat east, to the lands of Brabant and ever farther off, even to Picardy. I had an issue with the excavation of peat, for we dug out so much of the stuff we created wide and deep troughs in the land. I avoided doing this close to the bay or to the broad Scheldt in the north. During storm tides and high gales, the vast hollows might be flooded. I built dikes when I feared such inundations of the land, in agreement with the water-counts.

The construction business I had set up with Lammin Metsers became profitable too. Life was good again for many people in Axel! I bought two more farms from impoverished knights. We transformed those and filled the barns. We had more work than we could handle.

While I rode thus in the country, I came near Westdorp and saw a manor hidden in a wood. I wondered who lived there. Men were working at the gate that led to the manor. They told me a van Lake woman lived there. I had found Avezoete van Lake’s refuge, the manor of Quintine! The manor was a fine country house, but practically open on all sides, it could not really be defended if attacked by a large group of bandits. I saw guards patrol in front of the house, though.

I visited Avezoete, who was well, told her I would be back once every while to visit her. She had no news of Martin Denout.

I also and again began to make longer incursions into the eastern part of the Scheldt, much more northerly than hitherto. I visited the polders east of Lokeren and Temse, the lands south of the almost west-east bend in the stream from Lokeren to Hemiksem. I wandered much around the villages in which I had contracted the sickness, in Weert, Bornem, Puurs, Hingene and Niel, up the Scheldt, and even as far northerly as Hoboken. Maybe I was fascinated by these sites from what had happened to me, but all traces of the flagellants had disappeared and the faces that stared at me brought no memories of the group I had met. I practically reached the city of Antwerp, remarked how powerfully the stream flowed here.

In this country, I met my first tough competition, a new challenge for me. When I tried to buy land from the lords of the castellanies, working through their stewards, someone or a group of men forced the prices up. I had to bid. I could nevertheless acquire long stretches of polders along the stream, began to erect dikes, and I ordered canals to be dug to dry the polders out. A strange game was played around my person. Prices of land went up very high when I tried to acquire them! Often, I felt them far too high for the lands ever to become profitable. I braced myself to the game, eager to learn how high the anonymous buyers I was up against were willing to go. I went very high on a few lands, until I more or less understood how far my competitors wanted to block me. Somebody was doing his or her best to keep me away from the lands east of the Scheldt! I began to bid on stretches I did not really want, letting the bidding rise to very high, but stopping right before the maximum price at which I estimated the opposing party might bid. Those men, or women, who clearly wanted to keep me from terrains along the Scheldt, bought therefore quite useless lands at extremely high prices. They were obviously not buying land for the value, but for the pleasure or envy to stop me from extending my property. I grinned when I noticed the cost of lands then began to fall again, and I could secure polders I really wanted at more reasonable prices. When I had a territory of coherent stretches, I stopped buying altogether. That is, I feigned still wanting to buy, I drove up prices, but then I stopped, apparently disappointed at not having been able to gain those grounds, but laughing inside. The other party was buying land I did not want, and expensively at that! I did not continue this game for long, though. I never was one to seek conflicts. I considered I had bought enough polders for a few years. My priority changed to exploiting the lands fully. My dikes grew and became longer and higher, my canals dried out many fields. I installed farms. I expected little revenue from what I bought in those years. The drying out of polders cost very much money, and I would have to wait a few years before the polders could be converted to fine pastures and grain fields, but I had the means to be patient. My property on the other side of the Scheldt was bringing in much money in the meantime. I often wondered who bid against me.

The lands I did not want were lands on which worked many serfs. I did not want serfs! Serfs served a lord and could not leave the land on which they worked. They also did not own the land, but they had some form of right to work on the spot of land their father had tilled. I preferably bought polder lands on which nobody worked. When I did buy stretches on which serfs worked, I talked with them. The most intelligent ones I gave a decent farm, which they were to uphold for me, farms that covered much larger territories than they had worked on before. We discussed how they could take in journeymen, at what salaries. I offered them part of the profits, and discussed how much they could keep from the harvests for themselves, how much they owed me. In fact, they became some kind of serfs to me, but I set them free and they could leave my lands whenever they wanted. In return, they had no rights whatsoever anymore on the lands they lived on. The serfs who worked on little land, I promised a decent salary and freedom, a little land in total property, usually at the borders of my lands. Most of

them accepted my offers. They worked for me, but could grow vegetables on their own ground, keep a few cows and pigs, chicken and rabbits. I made them live in more decent houses. Some of them grew moderately prosperous, so that the hardest and most successful farmers asked me to sell some land to them. I agreed to those honest demands, and sold them some of my dried-out polder lands at high profit, but still at reasonable prices compared to the value of neighbouring lands. I helped them set up farms for themselves. Lammin Metsers had much work and he expanded his craft. I also obtained a steady supply of excellent products, victuals, which I brought to the Ghent markets.

The serfs who wanted to hear no reason, I chased from their lands. I gave them some money, not much, but chased them. I burnt their small thatched houses to the ground. I got a reputation for being ruthless, which I indeed had learnt to become with age. I can only give as excuse that when no reason was to be heard, no reason was to be given. I came into conflict with abbots and lords over these recalcitrant families, but I explained why I acted like I had, and added I was now lord of the lands, to do as I thought fit. I made no friends in those few cases, but I considered I had a clear conscience. Usually, the few men who withstood me had not done much good with their work, they lived in utterly miserable conditions, and they did not do much with their subsequent life either. The others, I helped as far as I could, and we bettered their life together.

My dikes brought other worries. Dikes built here, might inundate lands elsewhere, and this happened more than once! I had the absolute right to build dikes, asked the necessary permissions from abbeys or lords and from the water-counts. I had the right to dry out my polders. It would have sufficed for the owners of inundated or swamped lands to erect dikes too, and dig out canals, but I soon realised my competitors did not have such deep pockets as I. They could buy land, but failed to exploit the largest parts, which I considered a rather silly way of buying. They bought land, and therefore some form of power, but they forsook on profits and became less wealthy.

I continued to buy lands east of the Scheldt from the lords and from abbeys when I had no competition to fear. I became known as the lord of Terhagen, who was wealthy and unscrupulous in business. Few of those people knew I was working with Pharaïldis money, not with my own funds!

I asked several times of the lords and of the abbots who the men might be who entered competition with me, but the land-sellers consistently refused to provide me with names. I merely learned the men who bought lands like I, were rich poorters of Ghent who wanted to remain anonymous. In fact, I didn't care much. I was getting richer by the month from good husbandry, and that was the most important. The Pharaïldis Consortium was gradually becoming a large owner of vast and dispersed regions. In the year of 1351 I stopped buying altogether, and began to fully exploit my polders, which might have made a few envious men. I would launch a new buying spree after a few fat harvests! I took life a little easier, then, and remained more often than before at New Terhagen.

Wivine and I settled in a gentle life, in good understanding, but still in a state of many matters remaining unspoken of. This created some tension, but we tried to ignore the issues for the time being. The name of Quintine Denout was never mentioned except casually. Wivine was very pregnant by then, and had it not easy to move, although she wanted to move and stay fit. She walked, more often than not on my arm, in the yard of the castle, or around the moat. One had a fine view from those fields on the castle. I was thinking of constructing a larger garden, a herb garden, and of planting also small trees and flowery bushes at the other end.

We lived quietly at Terhagen. I acutely felt the urge to regularly return to Ghent, however, and sometimes I took Wivine with me to visit her family or the other families of the Pharaïldis group. That autumn and winter, we received no news from William van Lake, and also not of Martin and Quintine.

Although we loved Ghent, we also appreciated returning to the silence of Terhagen after the noise and bustle of the town. We decorated our manor with more and richer furniture, tapestries, and brocaded curtains. We bought in Ghent the finest vegetables, fruit and fowl. Fish and meat we obtained from our farm, and from the bay of Axel.

The overpowering image of Quintine faded, as we did not know how she did on her voyage. I settled with Wivine in a life of easy routine and great respect. We took pleasure from having the three families of our guard with us, the de Wilde, de Handscoemakere and van Noortkerke.

\*\*\*\*\*

On one of these quiet days of the spring of 1351, in the beginning of the afternoon, I returned from an inspection tour of my most northerly polders along the Scheldt. I was exhausted from the ride, and longed for a hot bath. My castle was not empty of people when I rode into the courtyard, but Marie Colpaert, the wife of our guard Everdey, told me Wivine, Everdey and Mathis had taken a cart and horse, and gone to Old Terhagen to fetch salted meat, new herbs and salads. I asked Marie whether she could warm a bath for me. A little later, I washed, and put on new clothes. Washing had become a habit for us after the sickness! When I was finished, I took my old, dirty clothes, and brought them to Marie, to put them with the rest of the clothes to wash.

When I passed the courtyard, I hear a distinct noise of approaching horses. I threw the clothes inside the open door of the washhouse, and ran to the gate to see what was happening outside. My heart skipped a beat. I expected Mathis and Everdey were returning. I saw at least twenty men on horseback, men armed and wearing mail, riding in gallop towards New Terhagen. The men seemed to ride directly to the castle, their eyes riveted on the gate. I didn't know what to make of them, expected no attack, rather surmised the men came to visit me or ask for roads, but they seemed to me too intently focused on the castle. Better take no chances!

I shouted the alarm and sounded the large bell we had hung inside the gatehouse, our alarm bell, our own *Klokke Roeland*. The bell had sounded before, always for false alarms, but we had made a habit of hearing it sound and then pretend the castle was being attacked for real. Everybody immediately ran out of the houses.

At an assault, the children had to run to inside the lords' manor, and run to a specific room close to the escape tunnel leading to the bay. Kateline, Ywen's wife, our cook, was in charge of the children. I had shown her the tunnel, she knew what to do to bring the children to safety. Ruebin, Kerstiaen, Arent, Lieve, Roegier and Zeger hobbled on their small legs to the manor. They knew their way, and dropped whatever they were doing at that moment. I saw them emerge from several doors and run. Kateline sprang from the kitchen and took Greet, Mathis's youngest daughter of two, from the hands of Anna, Mathis's wife.

Ywen de Wilde had grabbed a battle-axe and a crossbow. He ran to the tower in front of the gate. Marie Colpaert and Anne de Cleyne, the other wives of the guards, wore light spears and also a crossbow each, a bag of bolts on their shoulder. They ran to the walls, to stand behind the crenellations. I was so satisfied to have taught all the women to use the crossbows!

The drawbridge and the portcullis of new Terhagen had now to be drawn up and to be lowered respectively, and I stood closest to that mechanism, but I hesitated. The riders might just be a friendly group! I had heard of no war or revolt in the neighbourhood, and I wondered where Wivine, Everdey and Mathis were. I stepped out of the gate, until I stood between the first two, massive gate towers. Ywen called out at me, pointed, and I saw a spectacle that made my hairs stand up straight in my neck. The riders advanced rapidly from the east and north. They would reach the gate in only a few moments. From the opposite side, behind a bend around low bushes, rode a cart as fast as its horse could draw it, with in the cart Wivine and my two other guards. The cart might not reach the gate in time, earlier than the first horsemen, who, it seemed to me, showed now all but passive intentions, pointing to us with their spears and swords. Why would they have drawn swords in front of them, if not to attack us? They rode on with hard, determined faces, weapons in hands. I realised then this was definitely an attack. The men made an attempt to capture our castle! I had no idea who these men might be. They would cause a massacre among the women and children if they could not be stopped!

Wivine's cart managed to arrive in front of the gate, on the other side of the moat. Everdey held the reins of the cart, and I saw he placed the cart squarely between the riders and the gate of Terhagen. Everdey helped Wivine gently out of the cart, put her on the ground, and then he too turned to the horse riders, a spear in his hand. Everdey stood on one side of the cart, Mathis on the other, but when Wivine advanced to the gate, they too went backwards toward safety.

Wivine ran as hard as she could over the drawbridge, but a rider reached her, passed the cart in gallop and almost rode right over her with his horse. Wivine fell hard to the wood of the drawbridge. I wanted to jump forwards, but a bolt from a crossbow, shot by one of our women on the walls, pierced the mail of the man's heart. The rider fell hard on the ground, then he rolled in the cold water of the moat. His horse pranced over Wivine, neighed, then the animal ran off, bumping into other arriving horses. It ran back to the pastures in front of the castle.

Wivine did not get up from the ground. I ran to her. The heavy Everdey stood by then already in front of her, Mathis at his side, both fending off more horsemen who rode on.

I reached Wivine, acutely aware the castle gates stood wide open, and the drawbridge still lowered.

I bent to Wivine, who opened her eyes, thank God, and I took her up in my arms. She made a sign with her hand she could stand, so I let her to her feet, and I supported her, dragging her on to the first gate. My back was defended by Everdey and Mathis. They swung their battle-axe and heavy spear. Bolts whizzed over our heads into the oncoming riders. Each bolt found a target. Several riders fell, not all deadly wounded, but bolts in legs or shoulders were nasty wounds! Horses too got wounded from the longer arrows from three crossbows that shot from our walls. Our women shot accurately, even at moving targets!

I dragged Wivine into the yard, and put her there on the ground, hidden from view by the towers of the gatehouse. She crouched, and sat. Everdey and Mathis still defended the gate. I began to slam the gates shut, forgetting about the drawbridge for a while. We managed closing the large panels right at the noses of the riders. One rider slammed with his horse against the wood, but a crossbow bolt came to stick out of his neck, another one flew into his spine.

At least five corpses lay already on the wooden planks of the drawbridge and on the other side of the moat, and crossbow bolts came regularly down on the men. Our women knew well how

to sting! The gates closed, I went to the large wheel of the drawbridge and began to turn it. It was extremely hard to make it move.

Everdey, who came to help me, said, ‘the drawbridge is so heavy because horses are standing on it. Mathis, you try to shoot those riders off the drawbridge!’

We both hung with all our weight on the wheel, which began finally to turn.

Leaner Mathis ran to the walls. He took a large crossbow there, one of a few we always placed under a little shelter near the walls. He climbed the stairs by twos and threes, and then began raining heavier bolts onto the riders. A few moments later, Everdey and I could pull the drawbridge up. With the gates shut and the drawbridge up and vertical, but the portcullis down, we were safe.

The attackers might now use scaling ladders to climb up our walls, but they had been coming all on horseback, and I had noticed no ladders. How, also, would they pass the moat? No, they were checkmate. They might try to starve us out, but how could they do that with only a few tens of men? I realised they had been only seconds late to surprise us and ride in full force inside the yard. Then they would have overcome us, and captured Terhagen.

I too now fetched a heavy crossbow. I climbed the stairs of another tower, placed a bolt in the weapon, and took aim. Only about a dozen riders stood together in front of the water under our gatehouse. They hesitated on what to do next. There was not much else they could do now but flee, for Mathis and I sent bolts down, straight into their group, and so did Everdey and Ywen, and the two women. I aimed for a man I thought might be the leader, but a very nervous horse pranced at the last moment in front of my target and caught my bolt in the neck. That animal would not be of much use any longer. The horse pranced again, neighed abominably, galloped forward so that it threw off its rider, and plunged into the moat, from where it would never get out. More bolts slammed into the men. We had now two women and four men releasing deadly bolts on the walls and towers. We steadily took aim on the riders. Another horse stumbled, pitching its rider to the ground.

I heard loud curses, some also shouted in a French language. I distinctly heard some of the men crying we were Jews and Jews should be hanged. I wondered where the attackers had that notion from, but didn’t give it too much attention in the heat of the skirmish. The use of French also surprised me, but I didn’t do much wondering, kept cranking my crossbow and sent the short, iron bolts into the pack, now just shooting as rapidly as I could, without really aiming.

The riders could no longer stay there and be killed or wounded all, so they retreated and regrouped out of range of our bolts. I saw them hotly arguing and gesticulating, men showing our castle with outstretched hand as if to say, ‘how do you attack such a stronghold of impenetrable stones?’

We continued letting our bolts loose on the riders.

After a few moments, they must have decided to run off. They scrambled. They rapidly returned, looking in awe at our embattlements, picked up wounded men. Then they hit the sides of their horses with their spurs, and galloped back to the road of Axel. A man who had fallen to the ground ran to our cart, intending to take it with him, but he was too near the castle. Two bolts slammed into his back simultaneously. Our women granted no pity to who dared come near our home! He fell aside the cart. The other riders didn’t bother with him and also not with the cart. They rode off.

I thought, I had distinguished two leaders. One man was dressed in fine mail and in a thick, leather jerkin. He wore a long sword, and also fine riding boots just a little more gaudy than

for how the rest of the group was dressed. Right next to him rode a tall, very thin man, who may not have worn mail except for a shorter haubergeon, but who was dressed entirely in black, probably black leather, black tunic over his breast and back. I could not distinguish the escutcheon of the two leaders on their jupon, if they wore such distinctive signs. I was rather convinced the man in black had worn a badge, but one I had not recognised.

The riders did not stop. They spurred their horses into a canter. They rode back into the direction of Axel. I wondered about Old Terhagen, but our castle lay in the way of the riders, seen from the direction of Axel, and to Axel they had returned. They had aimed for the castle, not for the farm. They had wanted the castle! They were obviously not interested in stealing cattle and in killing farm-boys. They wanted us, me, at New Terhagen! Was this just a bunch of men who had wanted to take revenge on Jews? What for, after the pestilence?

I continued watching the riders for a few moments, until they disappeared behind the wood. I would not lower the drawbridge too soon! I went down the stairs of the tower to see how Wivine felt. I had left her lying in the yard. I found Wivine on the grass, but when I neared her, Anna and Marie came running to us too, and then I saw what Anna and Marie had already noticed from the top of the walls. Wivine's legs were covered with blood. A long, broad red line ran on the cobbles of the yard from where I had deposited her to the grass. Wivine had been trying to go or crawl to the manor, but she had stopped when she had noticed the blood. She was ostensibly in some pain, holding her belly with both her hands. Wivine had not been wounded by any weapon, I was sure of that. She was giving birth! She should not lose blood!

We stood near Wivine, horrified at the sight of her. She now screamed in pain.

Anna was the first to come to her senses. 'Ser Jehan, we must bring Lady Wivine to the manor, blood or no blood. Marie, we shall need towels and hot water. Bring that to her bedroom! I need you with me, and also Kateline. Fetch Kateline, please! Quick!'

I took Wivine up. She was keenly aware of what we were doing, and she knew perfectly well what was happening to her, but she was crying and shouted in suffering. Wivine had not lost conscience. She let her be brought in my arms to the manor, clinging with her hands to my neck and shoulders. I brought her upstairs, to our bedroom, placed her on the bed.

'You, out!' shouted Anna to me. She had taken command. 'This is women's business, no sight for men! Out!'

I wanted to open my mouth, protest I was the lord of the castle, but Anna looked so wildly self-assured I could not resist her command. I shut up and went out of the door. Marie and Kateline came running to me. Marie had a heap of white towels in her hands, and a large basin. Kateline wore a large jug of water. She cried we should care for the children. They disappeared into the bedroom.

I went downstairs, back into the yard, up the walls, stood next to Ywen, Mathis and Everdey. These remained on guard, crossbows over their shoulders. Everdey, the heaviest man of the three, was panting, but he pointed to Axel.

'We saw them ride off and away, lord. I guess they realised the castle was closed and too heavily defended for them. Our crossbows did their work. The bandits left a score of dead at our moat! Their brains must have been addled to attack a castle like ours at the gallop. They ran like scalded hares! I never saw women shoot so straight! Who would have thought that? I rather expected our women to run and hide in a dark corner, but they shot like warriors! I'll never stop being surprised by the wonders of the universe! Marie with a crossbow in her hands in a real fight! I'll have to be more careful with her, the next time, for I might get a bolt between my shoulder plates. They shot quite accurately too!'

'How is the Lady Wivine?' Mathis asked in a lower, compassionate tone.

Mathis was more aware than the two other guards what was happening. Ywen was only watching around, over the crenellations. I made a mental note of Mathis. He was the smartest of the three.

‘Wivine is giving birth,’ I replied. ‘Your wife, Anna, has taken command. The women shoved me out.’

‘Yes, they would do that,’ Mathis replied. ‘Births are women’s business. Anna has delivered quite a few children, including our own. She is a good midwife, so don’t you worry. A real midwife could do no better!’

‘One of us could get out on a fast horse and fetch a doctor,’ Everdey proposed. ‘I heard the nuns at Ter Hage have a small hospital. The abbess is a doctor.’

‘No doctor for the moment,’ I decided. ‘No doctor. Axel is too far away, and who knows whether those riders might be hiding somewhere in ambush between here and Axel. We wait a little longer. Then, if necessary, I’ll ride to the abbess herself. I know her.’

Mathis placed his crossbow against the wall, looked out over the plains, and then asked, as much to himself as to us, ‘who were these guys? They were well armed! Only lightly armoured, but at least one of them was a knight, I think. He wore a badge, but one I never saw before. The two leaders spoke French to each other. They were knights, all right! Were they bandits, mercenaries? Why would knights and mercenaries attack Terhagen? They came from far! They and their horses were covered in dust. Did they expect loot? Do you have enemies, Ser Jehan?’

‘I have not the slightest idea,’ I answered. ‘Maybe they were out for gold or loot. Terhagen is the only castle in the neighbourhood. This really came as a total surprise for me.’

The men remained silent, looked out.

‘Don’t go out yet, don’t lower the drawbridge, don’t open the gate,’ I ordered. ‘I’m going back to the manor. Everdey, somebody should look to the children, while the women are busy. Can you do that?’

I ran back over the yard, and into the manor, up the stairs. Everdey ran behind me on his short, stubby legs. He ran to the room where he knew the children waited.

When I reached the door to my bedroom, I heard screaming and screaming very hard. I stopped in my track. I waited at the door, dared not to enter. Then, the door was flung open, and Kateline bounced out. She slammed the door panels shut in front of my nose.

‘We want no men around,’ Kateline shouted. ‘Ver Wivine is giving birth. I must tell you it may not be going well. We do what we can. She has lost much blood, but she is courageous and helping us well. She received a horse’s hooves on her belly, you see! We noticed the blue marks. She may lose the child. We don’t know yet. Go downstairs, drink a few glasses of brandy, and don’t get into the way!’

I became very pale in the face. Kateline pushed me against the wall of the corridor.

‘Don’t you too faint on us, now,’ she cried. ‘We have our hands full with Ver Wivine. Pull yourself together. We need you not to bother us. We have no time to look after you, too. Go downstairs!’

‘Would it help if I got a nun, maybe a doctor from the abbey?’ I asked.

Kateline thought.

‘Yes,’ Kateline gave. ‘Definitely! Mother Amalberga is the best doctor for many miles around. Fetch her, no one else! If she wants to send another nun, refuse! A nun or other midwife cannot do more or better than Anna is doing. Fetch mother Amalberga! If she wants to come, that is!’

Kateline didn’t wait for an answer, hurried off.

I ran back to the walls, saw my guards still standing on the walls, Everdey with the children in tow going into the houses. The children, having escaped Kateline's attention, focused on their fathers.

'It is all right for the children,' Everdey excused. 'We believe the riders won't come back, but we'll stay on guard. We'll organise shifts during the night. If the riders do come back, we'll bring the children back to the escape room.'

I went up the walls, now feeling very tired. Mathis hung with his two arms over the crenellations.

'There is no sign of them,' he told me.

'I have to ride to Ter Hage,' I cried. 'I have to fetch the abbess. If I don't return, you're in charge. You must be in charge, Mathis. Be ruthless in command! You are the most capable to know what to do!'

'Take the cart,' Mathis said. 'The cart is almost empty. It will be easier for the nun, and you'll ride more carefully. Take cloaks. The rain is coming. Ywen should accompany you, on horseback, in mail. We hold the castle. Watch out for those bandits!'

A little later, Ywen and I rode out of the castle. I saw Mathis gathering the six or seven dead men near the moat, searching their pockets, gathering their weapons and bringing them inside the yard. The last I saw was how he shot a crossbow bolt into the head of the horse that was still in the water, splashing with broken legs. I was already wondering how we were going to pull the carcass out of the moat.

Ywen and I rode to Ter Hage. I did not need much time to convince Mother Amalberga to come with us. We reached New Terhagen in the evening, and luckily saw no riders.

Amalberga ran to the bedroom and stayed there. I went back up the walls, told the men to go and have something to eat while I held guard.

The darkness fell black, but the riders still had not returned. I had feared they had merely gone off to come back with more men, but they did not return. Everdey came first back to the walls. We placed torches on the other side of the moat, closed the gates again, and pulled up the drawbridge.

I went back to the manor. I had seen from above the women ran to the washhouse, white and bloodied linen in their hands. Many peals of water were brought on the run to the manor. I went to my hall, seated at the table, and remained there. Sometime later, I took jugs of wine and cups to Ywen, Everdey and Mathis on the walls. I was grateful for what the guards and their wives had done, moved by warm feelings of friendship. Everdey told me the children slept. I went back to my hall.

In the middle of the night, Mother Amalberga came to the great hall. She looked exhausted. She came to sit on a chair at my table. I waited for her to speak and offered her some food to eat, a cup of wine to drink, which she accepted.

She sighed. 'I am afraid I have not so good news for you, Ser Terhagen. Ver Wivine lost her child! The child, a boy, was very much hurt by the horse. He bled. He didn't survive the birth. I am sorry. We saved Ver Wivine. She will live, I can assure you. She too was hurt. She was hit by the hooves of a horse while the castle was being attacked, I heard. Sometimes, God takes and God gives. Lady Wivine will be all right, with time. She has lost much blood, but she is a strong woman. We pushed out everything of her womb that was hurt. She is a strong, courageous woman. She was very much in pain, but helped us. I suggest you let her sleep until she awakens. Anna and I shall watch over her this night and tomorrow. Remarkable woman, that Anna! You must lend her to me sometimes. I fear something else. I have seen

cases like this before. Women who were hurt like Ver Wivine have rarely given another birth. I may be wrong, but I don't think I am, and I feel it is better not to give you false hope.' I bowed my head and cried.

I slowly, painstakingly, gained control of my mind.

Amalberga added, 'you should not show grave sorrow when you come to see your wife tomorrow. Please try to be kind towards her, do not reject her. I should not tell you what to do, but I think you like her, and have respect for her. After birth, women are in need of affection, of tenderness, and Ver Wivine shall need that even more. It will be hard for a couple of weeks. Keep that woman Anna close to her. Anna must make Ver Wivine eat, for your wife may refuse life. Anna must nurse her closely. You should talk to Ver Wivine often, and give her courage. Time shall heal.'

I nodded.

I asked, 'what did you do with the child?'

'We enveloped it in white linen. A man, one of your guards, a man called Ywen I think, buried it near the castle, in what he said was a nice spot, fine ground for a small churchyard. He buried the child in dry ground. A priest should consecrate the site, but that can be arranged later. If it may be a consolation to you, know that I baptised the child while it still breathed, when I realised it was leaving the world but had not done so yet. It will be a little angel.'

'I thank you for everything, Mother Amalberga,' I said. 'I am profoundly in debt to you.'

'There should be no talk of debts between us,' Amalberga sighed. 'You saved us from dishonour and destruction, you know that. I love God, you know, Ser Jehan, but I fail to understand why He allows such bad things to happen to us. Who knows His ways? You may have children yet. That would be a sign of His grace.'

Amalberga sighed.

Then she continued, 'you should also think about the attack. I heard of no castles or manors or farms or villages in the neighbourhood being attacked by bandits. I rather thought Axel was free of bandits. Why then, was your castle attacked, by whom?'

'I have no idea,' I replied truthfully. 'Some of the men shouted we were Jews and therefore to be killed, but that accusation makes no sense.'

'It doesn't,' Amalberga reflected. 'There are no Jews left in Axel. I know. I helped them escape! Everybody knows you and the inhabitants of this castle are good Christians. Maybe it was an accusation needed to rally men to the ones who planned the attack.'

'Maybe,' I agreed with the suggested explanation.

'You know, Jehan,' Mother Amalberga confessed to me, calling me by my given name for the first time, as if we had been old friends, 'I have given up asking why God allows cruel things to happen, why the sickness came, why armies clash and why men fight. My mind was confused too much by the horror and by questions as to the sense of it all. I have not lost faith, but in order to keep my faith I had to push such many questions aside. I am not concerned with the why of matters anymore, Jehan. I try to do good, hoping the good finds agreement with God. I am merely concerned now with the how, you see, with how to please God and how to bring good to the world. One must be modest to think that way, but what are we compared to the greatness of God? You are a troubled man, as many of your families. Do not ask too many questions, Jehan, and do good around you. I believe that is the only way to be blessed by God.'

I found Mother Amalberga's words very wise, but very inadequate. Still, the why eluded me completely, too. We were two souls baffled by total incomprehension of the world.

I could see Wivine for the first time in the afternoon of the next day. She was weak but conscious. She cried when I stood near the bed, breathed in desperate gasps. I could not say very much. I squeezed her hand.

‘You see how I was punished for taking possession of you,’ she said. ‘I am cruelly punished! We shall have to live with that. My sin is purged now, but at what horrible price! What a cruel God we have, to punish me this way, by taking an innocent child for my sin.’

‘There was no sin, and no other sin but one of love,’ I replied. ‘And God has not punished you. Those bandits were not sent by God. They came by their own design to do evil, not by God’s. We will survive this ordeal, too, Wivine.’

She then slept.

I wondered, however, whether the old dualities of which people and priests spoke, of sin and punishment, exercised by one or other terrible power in the universe, maybe by God, might hold truth after all. Why had I been drawn to Niel after I had slept out of wedlock with Wivine? Why had I contracted the illness? Why had I remained so passive when the flagellants touched men so that I had suffered from the pestilence? Was a power at work to scourge also Wivine and me, for what everybody regarded as sin? Had there to remain an equilibrium in the universe between sin and suffering for sins committed? Wivine and I had sinned and we had suffered, we had been scourged. How about Quintine? Quintine had sinned with me. How would she have to pay? A cold fear gripped me, then. Where was Quintine? Was she all right on her far voyage, or not? Questions, questions, too many questions remained unanswered, had said Amalberga!

Mother Amalberga left in the evening of that day, accompanied by Everdey and Mathis. My two guards returned in the night. They had seen nothing of the bandits, no trace of them. They thought the men must have been roaming mercenaries, evil, cruel men. The riders would be far by now. I nodded. I would have to find out more about this group.

We remained on our guard for two weeks more, drawbridge usually vertical. At Old Terhagen, nothing had happened. The farm had not been attacked.

I spoke a lot with Wivine, told her to have courage. She blamed herself for the death of her child. I gave her one argument after the other why she should not do that, and since I stayed long hours together with her, talking and caring for her, I think she interpreted that as loving tenderness for her. I was truly tender with her, and wanted her to know I appreciated her, and mourned our son as much as she. Wivine talked also about what Amalberga had said about more children. She mentioned it to me, and cried. She was a strong woman, however, she got better gradually, also in her head.

After two more weeks, I rode to Axel and to the surrounding villages. Nobody could give me useful information about the bandits. It seemed the group had suddenly come riding in from the east, but nobody knew precisely from where. They had not stopped in the town, and attacked nowhere else but at the castle Terhagen. I wondered why they had done so, but received no answers.

At Terhagen, we held guard, also at night. I thanked the guards, and also the women, for they had defended Terhagen as well as the best warriors would have done. From that time on, they became like family to us.

We buried the men that had been killed by our crossbow bolts. We found no particular clues on the men of who they were, nor in the saddle packs of the slain horses. We buried them in our churchyard, which was given them too much honour, but we did it. Later, Lammin Metsers built a wall around our new churchyard. We got the dead horse out of the moat, using many men from the farm and long ropes.

Normal, quiet life resumed. We lowered our drawbridge again during the day, but kept henceforth the gates closed, the herse down often. We feared the night, for we were too few to hold guard also in the dark. Finally, we decided to sleep after dark, but one of us always got up very early, before dawn, and then climbed immediately to the walls. We feared in particular for the children.

Wivine got better. She got up from her bed, ate, began to walk in the yard and then in our garden. I caught her going regularly to the churchyard, fresh flowers in her hands. A sadness hung from then on in her eyes, and she looked with much tenderness at the children playing in our courtyard.

### Quintine Denout's Story

Martin Denout showed up from Rome at New Terhagen in the summer of 1351. I had expected him to come back much earlier, but when he started to tell us his story, we soon pardoned him. That day, he rode to the closed gate of our castle, shouting joyful curses for not being immediately allowed in.

Everdey de Handscoemakere stood guard at the front tower at that moment, and Everdey had recognised Martin, but Everdey was something of a joker himself, so he played the fool to alert us all by pretending not to know the riders who approached and waited for the gate to open. Everdey blew on his horn as if twenty bandits stood at our moat again, but that was only of joy, for Everdey quite liked Martin and the girl who rode with him. Finally, Everdey agreed to open the oak panels to the foreigners, and by that time we all stood, laughing, hands at our waists, waiting in the courtyard.

Martin cherished the attention we granted him.

‘What is this,’ Martin brawled, ‘don’t you want to recognise your best friend anymore? What has become of the hospitality of castle Terhagen? Make way for the *Gentenaar* Martin and for the noble lady Avezoete van Lake!’

Martin had first travelled to Ghent, of course, and fetched Avezoete as soon as he had returned to Flanders. The two were bound to marry soon, now. Martin had been absent for almost an entire year, but he had not forgotten the lovely Avezoete. Avezoete rode as radiant as her future husband, cheeks red with excitement and laughter, and behind them trailed two wagons loaded no doubt with Avezoete’s things, which came also with two servants and two maids. Martin Denout entered in style!

After his boisterous and joyous entry, Martin, who had evolved into a thicker-set, self-confident, strong young man, embraced us all. He hugged me and Wivine, Ywen and Everdey and Mathis and their wives and children, and we all proceeded to the hall for welcome drinks, for Martin declared instantly his throat was dryer than the throat of a salted herring.

‘I’ve come to help you with the lands you bought,’ he told me while we ascended the stairs, ‘and I brought Avezoete, too, to keep Wivine company. I thought we might as well marry here, in the church of the abbey of Ter Hage. We don’t like the buzz of large feasts we would have to suffer at our wedding in Ghent, the lengthy ceremonies in church and the pomp of the many priests. We shall marry here, in the countryside, and throw in a banquet in Ghent one evening. We can stay at Terhagen if you want, but Avezoete would prefer to live at Westdorp. She wants her own house, I suppose. We can decide about all that later on! Now, tell me, how have things been lately?’

We explained how matters stood, dining in our hall, at our table, everybody gathered, drinks in hand, also our guards, their wives and their children present, the gates of New Terhagen closed, and no guard kept on the towers for the rest of the day. We stayed in our hall and heard Martin talk of Rome until late in the night. We decided the Denout family should stay for a few days with us, at New Terhagen.

The presence of Avezoete van lake was very good for Wivine. I noticed her happy and smiling, twinkles shining in her eyes when Martin told us his story with long gestures and strong voice.

Martin babbled on without stopping one moment. I heard only half of what he was saying to his sister about his travels, for my mind was too much on his other sister, on Quintine, who must have returned with him from Rome. Had she returned or had she found a nice young man in Rome and had stayed there? Agony was my destiny that evening! I let Wivine be seated next to Martin all the time, while I organised the drinks and the meal, anxiously waiting for the moment when Martin would tell us where Quintine was.

Martine didn't mention Quintine, so I managed to ask him whether he had returned alone. He told us then Evrard, the monk, had returned with him, and also his sister, Quintine. I must have sighed audibly, so relieved was I. Evrard had remained in Ghent for the time being, but he had promised to visit us soon. Quintine too had stayed in Ghent for a while, and then she had preferred to ride to the manor of Westdorp. From then on I listened with more attention to what Martin told. We went to sleep very late.

The next day, having heard enough of the understandably enthusiastic but endless tales of Martin, and hearing nothing further about Quintine in those tales except that she had returned in good health, and not daring to ask for more, I pretended having to deal with urgent business near the Scheldt. Avezoete and Martin would ride to the convent of Ter Hage, to prepare their wedding. I gave them Everdey and Ywen, for I feared he party of bandits that had attacked New Terhagen might still roam in the neighbourhood. I put Mathis in charge of the castle, and I rode to Westdorp with a very bad conscience, but I rode as fast as I could.

I wasn't too sure I would find Quintine at Westdorp Manor, and I was even less sure she would receive me and let me talk to her. I wondered what had happened to her in Rome, how she felt, whether she had fallen in love or had chosen to become a nun. I couldn't help myself from riding to Westdorp, even if I felt like a satyr and a sinner. I just had to see Quintine again, look at her earnest face and at her lank figure, if possible hold her tight against me for a few moments and feel her body once more.

When Quintine looked at me, the blue sky dropped to around me, and I walked on clouds. Her eyes transpierced me, my knees trembled, my legs buckled, and my voice would sound shrill, my clumsy phrases would be stammered. She had that kind of effect on me! I felt like a boy of twelve again. Quintine was my queen, my master and my torturer! She was my heartbeat, as well as the simmering poison that had conquered my mind. I expected her to scold me and send me away, but I wanted to see her! The other arguments that whirled in my mind, all the things I wanted to say to her, such as I had wanted to wish her a happy return, I had wanted to pay her a neighbourly visit, merely wanted to know how she did, all these were but illusions and subterfuges. I still loved Quintine, she had bewitched my brain, and I longed for her with all my being.

I rode through the open gates of the manor, cursing over how insecure and careless Quintine dwelled in Westdorp. I made a lot of noise with my horse in the courtyard in front of the house, scrutinising the windows for a glimpse of Quintine. Nobody moved at first, not even a

servant maid. Then, the elegant door panels opened wide, and a single figure showed against the darker background of the interior.

Quintine stood tall, dressed in a long woollen dress, in resplendent green embroidered with red flowers, an expensive dress laced at the hems, cut deep at the bosom. She wore no jewels, her red hair hung deeper of colour and in long, glossy waves much lower over her shoulders than before. Her face was darker too, more speckled, green eyes sparkling bright like rare gems, her thicker lips more sensual and slightly open, breathing hard as if she had run, nostrils flaring. She held her arms open, against the two panels. She stood in the bright light, livelier and more wonderful that I remembered her, more beautiful than I could imagine, and fuller of figure than I had kept her in my mind, more alluring and challenging than in my memories. Would she receive me? I had an inkling to force my horse up the broad, stone stairs to be quicker near her, but I stepped down, threw the reins around a wooden post near the stairs, and ran up to her.

When I hurried over the high platform at her door, she unexpectedly also ran towards me, glowing with aroused delight, and in a heartbeat we flew in each other's arms on the stairs. Quintine hid her face between my neck and shoulder, and I caressed her hair and kissed her ear a hundred times. I heard her crying, sobbing, and I knew all was well. Quintine still loved me! She clung to me, dug her nails in my back, clung so tightly I feared she wanted to choke me. She turned her head, showing how tears rolled from her eyes in pearls, and we kissed, lips opened. We kissed passionately, tongues groping, taking the other in, she caressing my neck with her long fingers, my hands feeling all over her body. I was a hot kiss, pregnant with sensual desire.

We remained standing on her dais, but finally I heaved her from the ground, bowed and placed my arm under her legs hidden in the dress, carrying her in my arms through the door. I had never been inside the manor. I saw a large staircase with wooden ramps leading up. I supposed the bedrooms were upstairs, so I ascended the monumental, turning stairs, and looked at Quintine. She smiled and pointed a finger to a room at the end of the corridor, on the left. I opened that door with two fingers, entered, and discovered a bed. I lowered Quintine on the covers, and closed the door behind me. Our clothes flew around in another heartbeat. Then, I threw me on Quintine like a madman, entered her, and she scratched my back to blood from high to low with her long, sharp fingernails.

Long afterwards, we were lying on the rumpled bed. I played with my fingers on Quintine's back, for she lay naked on her belly. I studied her curves over her spine from neck to buttocks, over her lovely legs.

'Do you still love me?' she asked, as if such a question seemed necessary after our impetuous meeting.

We had been ravenous of each other. I loved her so much, desired her so much, and was so happy of having found her back the way I had dreamt of her so often, I might have started crying. My heart was bursting of joy. Sweeter feelings did not exist.

I whispered, 'I never did anything else, Quintine. You cannot imagine my agony while you were in Rome. I imagined you falling in love with one of the companions of your brother, with a good-looking sunburnt Roman knight, or becoming the mistress of a cardinal, squealing your pleasure, sweating in a hot Roman bed, or else wanting to become a nun in a cloister, lost to me forever. I feared never seeing you again, never! I always loved you, Quintine, whatever happened and whatever may happen. I love you. You know that!'

'Yet you are married, Jehan, and I must suffer in knowing you in the arms and inside my sister. My sister! My twin sister! How many children have you made with her?'

‘Wivine expected one,’ I admitted. ‘She lost that child. She will have no more. Something was torn inside her at the birth, the doctors said. Wivine will remain childless, Quintine. Have some pity! But yes, I am married to Wivine. I had to do what was right, hadn’t I? I realise now I should not have married her, child or not, but she was having my child, Quintine. The sin was not in the adultery with you. The sin was in the adultery with Wivine. I thought I could forget you. Well, I definitely could not, the feeling strengthened when we were sick together, and later, the more we got separated, the more I longed for you. I made such a mess of us! A mess of lies, of self-delusion, of hypocrisy. I shall have to clear up the mess, however painful it may be.’

‘No,’ Quintine yelled suddenly. ‘The mess is between Wivine and me, and it was much her fault the mess started. I know that for sure. I’ll talk to Wivine! You keep out between the two of us. We are twins, remember! I’ll talk to Wivine. That is, if you allow me to tell her how matters stand with us, with you and me. And no, I have not the slightest intention of becoming a nun! I have every intention to draw you to my bed and devour you whenever I feel like, wanting you.’

She paused.

‘I thought a lot about us in Rome, Jehan, and also during the voyage. When my decision was taken, my thoughts clear and bright, I wanted to travel back immediately, but Martin and Evrard had to stay in Rome for various reasons a long time still. We also had to earn our indulgencies. The months they lingered in hot, humid, awful Rome were my agony! I don’t want Wivine mentioned anymore while you’re with me, now. We’ll solve the issue with Wivine later, but I know what I have to do, don’t you worry. Now, I want to savour you, my ardent lover! Come here! How I missed this!’

Quintine drew me back to her and our flesh touched, hottened.

Much later, evening fallen to night, we sat still in her bed, candles around her, and also two large, silver trays of food with dishes and forks and knives lay between us. We were eating. It was the first time that day I had something to stem my hunger, and Quintine pushed as much of the cold chicken breast, bread and cheese in her mouth, as I. She began telling about her stay in Rome, and how she had arrived in the holy city. She gave me Quintine’s story.

‘All things considered, the trip to Rome was in fact uneventful,’ Quintine stated between two bites in. ‘We sailed from Sluis to La Rochelle in a de Hert ship, and from there to Bordeaux. At Bordeaux, we caught a ship for Bayonne. There, we had much luck and found another cog that took us all around Spain to Barcelona. We sailed slowly, but avoided entirely travelling over land. From Barcelona, we sailed on to Marseille. The only worry we had was how to find a ship for the next harbour, and that for as many as we were in our company. I was sick at sea the first few days, not violently, but I got used rather soon to the dancing of the deck under my feet. We never sailed into tempests, hiding in ports when the weather roughened. We followed the coasts of the Mediterranean, and those trips were wonderful. I saw the finest landscapes you could imagine, Jehan! How vast and splendid the world God created can be, Jehan, how small Ghent looks when you travel along those coasts for days on end, weeks, months! How endless the waters flow! It was the first time I saw the sea, and the first time I floated on the waves, felt the wind blowing in my hair, and tasted the salty air. In harbours, I visited the ruins of ancient civilisations, saw vast but broken buildings that dwarfed our *stenen* houses and even our cathedrals. As exciting as the landscapes and the sea voyages were, as boring were the monks and the young men of Ghent who accompanied us. They were brainless braggarts, who had no idea of what was on my mind, were not interested in what I was thinking about or what I wanted from life. They tried to bed me by making large eyes at me filled with desire. They were not half as exciting as the young men of the Pharaïldis

families, and much less exciting than the image of you I bore with me. They were no men. They were headless idiots, lacking erudition, courage and daring. It didn't take long before they sulked in a corner and consoled themselves with the knowledge I travelled to Rome to become a nun. One thought I was a nun in disguise! Actually, that was what Martin tried to tell them at one point, when they had conspired to grab me and rape me! I took to wearing a long dagger from that time on! The captains of the ships laughed their heads off at the discomfiture of the Ghent boys.'

I too had to laugh, but wryly, when Quintine told this, but I seethed and blamed myself for having pushed her – unwillingly – into this ordeal.

'We reached Marseille,' Quintine continued, 'where we boarded a ship for Genoa and Rome. That cog drew slowly by many small harbours before arriving in Rome, so we lost much time on the Italian coast, but we visited the port cities, which were all very marvellous. Usually, just Martin, Evrard and one or other monk walked out. I found out one of the young monks secretly desired me as much as the knights of Ghent, so I had to fend that one off too. When I threatened to cut him between the legs, he quietened. After that, it was only me and Martin and Evrard who visited the ports. Evrard kept an eye on his younger monks. So, we reached Rome eventually. We sailed into the harbour of Ostia and went to Rome on horseback. Now, Rome is a wonderful city, Jehan, and I will not ever be able to describe accurately the wonders I saw there, but it was also the dirtiest mass of rubble of a city I ever saw!'

At that moment, she pushed a piece of delicious cheese in my mouth, broke bread pensively and honied it, cut it carefully in two and gave me one piece, ate the other.

She continued, 'from Evrard we learned what the jubilee year was all about. You see, jubilee comes from the Latin word of jubilation, to rejoice or to shout. Pope Boniface VIII instituted the first jubilee year for the Christians in 1300. Boniface had in mind to have the feast given every hundred years thereafter, but many people urged our Pope Clement VI at Avignon to install it every fifty years. The number fifty, was argued, came from the book of Leviticus in the Bible, which states that after seven times seven years would come the year of atonement, the year in which the trumpets would be heard over the lands. The Holy Year was therefore proclaimed in 1350, and the pilgrimage to the holy city of Rome made mandatory. Full remission of sins was promised for the pilgrims who visited the basilicas of Saint Peter and Saint Paul outside the walls, at least once a day for ten to fifteen days for foreigners, more days for the Romans of the city. Pope Clement added visits to Saint John in Laterano to the list as the condition for the plenary indulgence.

I wanted to travel to Rome to gain indulgence indeed, forgiveness from God, for having slept with the husband of my sister, for you married Wivine. I thought I had committed a horrible sin. I was also very confused about what had happened between us. I needed time and distance to digest conflicting feelings, Jehan! Anyway, there we were, in Rome, looking for a place to stay.

That proved a lot more difficult than we had expected! You cannot imagine how many people gathered in Rome! Thousands arrived each day, and stayed! All the inns were occupied with people, huddling together by tens in a little room where previously only one was meant to stay in. The Romans exercised no charity towards pilgrims. On the contrary, they squeezed the money out of the pilgrims' pockets extremely efficiently, without afterthought and in the most scandalous way. A piece of bread cost fortunes, a place to sleep in cost fortunes, and so on.

We understood quickly why the pope had added a church to the list of places to visit, for everywhere one had to pay! Rome was also filled with robbers, so that more than once Martin

and the young knights who accompanied us had to stand in a circle with drawn swords around me and the monks. I admit I underestimated a few of the young men, for they showed courage and determination in Rome, confronting this adversity. Evrard and his monks found refuge in a house of the Franciscans, and the Franciscans intervened with the Poor Clares to free a small cell for me in their guest house. I was lodged in the same cloister as was one sister Bridget, who had come from Sweden in the very far north. Martin and the boys finally found a room in an inn, but we had to share our money, so expensive was their lodging. Before they discovered that place, they had to sleep outside in a street for more than a week! Later, they found a cheaper place, a place also more outside Rome than within the city walls.

When we were thus settled, we made our visits to the three churches, three churches a day for fifteen days! Each time we had to pay, hand over money, pay for our pardon from the inexhaustible source of pardons the Virgin and Christ and the saints held in stock for us. Was that really the wish of the saints? I doubt that! Christ was ever poor. A strange thing it was indeed we could simply buy our indulgencies in this way, when Christ himself had been so destitute!

Rome desperately needed the money, for the holy city lay as much in ruins as the ancient Roman remains! The streets were encumbered with rubble. The old ruins were neglected, houses were built for contemporary Romans within the thousand year old, ruined buildings. Saint Paul's had been toppled by earthquakes, Saint John's roofs had collapsed. Hardly any church of Rome had still an entire roof above its nave! Chickens, pigs, rats and goats stumbled around in the streets, and even in the cloisters and abbey grounds. So many people agglutinated in Rome, we had to fray ourselves a way in every street, shoulder against shoulder. Our churches of Ghent are not less great than the basilicas of Rome, Jehan! The Pope had named two legates to head the program of indulgencies and of absolutions for sins, and that program, at least, was well organised. The papal legates, Annibaldo da Ceccano and Guido of Boulogne-Sur-Mer, staged grand ceremonies, endlessly long masses, which we attended. We saw King Louis of Hungary, but not the pope. We guessed the pope preferred to stay in Avignon, which was logical. With so many thousands pouring in each day, hundreds of thousands filling the streets, even one contagious man or woman suffering from the plague, would have spread the pestilence so quickly that hundreds of thousands would have died in the shortest period! For me, the greatest miracle of the jubilee year in Rome was that the pestilence did not break out amidst that crowd, there and then!

'Wait,' I interrupted Quintine, 'if the pope was not in Rome, and if the pope only assigned legates for the jubilee ceremonies, who then ruled the city?'

'I heard of some kind of parliament, which might be the equivalent of our council of aldermen, and like in Ghent, the parliament of Rome was mostly constituted by the noble families of the city. I didn't ask too many questions about that, because the subject seemed very sensitive. Four years ago, a man of humble origins called Cola di Rienzi came to power. On Whit-Sunday of 1347, and having come to some prominence earlier, he invited the people to a parliament, addressed the crowd near the Capitol of Rome and asked for power to rule. The power was granted to him, so that he began to rule over the city with wisdom and justice, clearing it of robbers and restoring peace. The old lineages of Rome had left the city by then, but fomented revolt. Cola di Rienzi imprisoned some of these nobles. He seemed to have been something of an original, fantastic thinker, for he spoke of a united Italy, and of a new empire headed by the pope.

In some ways, when the people of Rome who dared to talk to me about Cola di Rienzi, always in whispers, making sure nobody could hear us, I was reminded of the short rule of James van

Artevelde, to whom our families were connected. Cola ruled effectively over Rome for about one year, but then the nobles made war on him. With the help of King Louis of Hungary he defeated them in a battle outside the Tiburtine Gate, but at the end of 1347 the pope denounced him as a criminal, so that he fled from Rome. He travelled to Naples first, then he sought the protection of Emperor Charles IV in Prague, which was a contradictory move to say the least. As far as I could find out, the emperor threw him in prison, where he remained while we were in the holy city.

I suppose Rome is now still ruled by the old lineages, the Colonna and the like, but the name of Cola di Rienzi is still whispered by the people. It was said the pope too wanted to curb the power of the noble families, and secretly wished the help of Cola once more, but such developments are far in the future. When we left the city, the pope did not rule Rome at all, and I suppose that too was one of the reasons why the popes fled to Avignon and why the current pope has not returned.'

Quintine continued her own story.

'In Rome, Jehan, I talked a lot with Bridget of Sweden. She was truly a holy woman, but the more she tried to convince me to never see you again, the more I ached for being with you! She told me God loved his own and protected the women who were in distress. Why then, I asked, are there so many martyrs among the saints, also among the women saints? She then said not to blaspheme, but I did not get much better as an answer. The more she told me to abjure sin, the more my heart filled with love and joy when I thought of you and of my family. Bridget would have liked me to become a nun, one of her order. She flattered and cajoled me, but I hesitated and tarried for so long she gave up and sought to convert to her cause less recalcitrant young women.

By that time, Jehan, I had seen so many horrors in Rome I began to doubt the splendid image of God's reign the cardinals presented us in their grand ceremonies. The God I loved was the God of the Fremineuren, and that God could not be the God who had created the putrid streets and the half devastated churches of the holy city! What had we, humans, made of the city that should be the holiest of all? I saw the largest possible contrast between rich and poor. Poor men without legs but with pieces of rough wood attached to their stumps hurried next to me during the holy masses, begging in the churches. Poor women dressed in dirty rags, ridden with insects, sold their bodies to pilgrims and monks. A piece of dried bread was sold around the churches for a fortune. For a gulp of clear water, one had to walk far! Sellers of relics stood at every house corner, shouting for their products. Nails from the cross and from the coffin of Christ were sold by the dozen, as many bones from as many saints as you might wish, bones of which I could see they were too rough, too large to be human. A man sold a flask of Christ's tears shed on the cross, another one sold the very milk from the breast of the Virgin. I could have bought a bone of Saint Peter, a piece of the cloak of Saint Paul, even the dust Saint Andrew had threaded on, wood from a table Saint Joseph had carved, and so on! It was sheer madness! I bought nothing! In that atmosphere, Jehan, I understood I did better to apply my own judgement to what happened to me than to listen to cardinals and holy women. I read the Evangelists again and again, and stuck to the larger, more fundamental messages of God. Did I not better listen to my internal voice, which told me to return to Ghent and throw me in your arms? Was that not God's message to me in Rome, the message I had come for? Wasn't love the most important gift of Christ? Yet, lepers walked in the streets, next to priests dressed in silk, and the cardinals wore heavy golden crosses on their breasts. Very rich people of families with grand names live in Rome, and all seek to have at least one cardinal among their members. Cardinals do not have to be priests or bishops, they do not marry but they have mistresses who are driven about in rich chariots.

Nobody seemed to care much for the poor and the sick in Rome, contrary to our Ghent, in which we have so many hospitals, even one for the blind, one for lepers and one for people who have lost their minds too! Father Evrard told me of his aversion for that heartless kind of Christianity too. This was definitely not how we, in Flanders, considered our faith. Bridget tried to convince me to join her order, urged me to read the lives of the saints, but I longed for the light of love in Rome, and did not find it.

Mind you, there seems to hang something mysterious over the ruins of old Rome and a strange atmosphere pervades the many small churches of the city, poor as they are. The people of Rome can be joyous and generous. The Roman mothers love their children and the Roman common men, carpenters, smiths and the like, work as hard as we in Ghent do. The more I knew of Rome, the more I understood faith was not represented by clever heaps of stone, as cathedrals do. Faith was not made apparent in splendid ceremonies of opening and closing massive doors to us. Faith was in my heart, Jehan, and my faith was love, and I wanted all the love I could get, give and take, not hide it in a convent. I gradually realised the finest gift God has granted us was the faculty to love. How can one give love by hiding inside a convent and remain silent for months on end? Is that a courageous act? I also couldn't be seduced by Giovanni, Andrea or Angelo who lived in that world. From that moment on, I wanted to return to Ghent.

It took us a few months before Evrard and Martin decided to travel back to Flanders. I could not return on my own! Evrard was too happy talking about holy subjects to his brother-monks, to the priests and cardinals, and Martin was chasing pretty Roman girls, of which there are many. He has not been as faithful to Avezoete as he may have told, and I wouldn't be surprised at all if he had left one or other pregnant girl behind. In the end, he wanted to leave so surreptitiously I supposed a cuckolded husband or a disgruntled father was after him. Despite his frivolity, Martin was courageous, a great help, a charmer and a good organiser. He is smart, Jehan, and has been gifted with cunning. He got us out of tight spots on water and on land. So, we sailed back to Marseille, but from there we travelled over land, following the faster route along the Rhône River, using river boats on different stretches.

We were only the three of us left, I, Martin and Evrard. The monks had stayed on in Rome, my brother's friends had returned earlier and separately. I dressed like a man, rode in boots and wore a tight leather jerkin, hid my hair under caps. I could fool nobody from close by, but from a distance we looked like weathered travellers, dangerous men, wearing long swords at our sides, me too! I even bought me a crossbow and hung that on my horse. We bought strong horses in Marseille already, you know. We travelled north to Nevers and Troyes. From there, by Hainault and Brabant, we safely reached Ghent.

That is my story, Jehan, my love. I am glad to be back in Flanders! I travelled all the way to Rome to forget about you, and I came back stronger in love and more determined in mind. You are not going to leave me now, aren't you?' 'Absolutely not,' I hushed Quintine. 'I belong to you and you to me. Whatever bad could happen to us when we love so much?'

I forgot to tell Quintine about the attack on New Terhagen, until she brought up the subject of Wivine, and how Wivine had lost the child.

Quintine was alarmed.

She looked at me, head in her fists, saying, 'you should take this seriously, Jehan! You have enemies somewhere. That group targeted New Terhagen! I heard of no assault on manors or

castles in the neighbourhood, not in the larger environs. Nobody mentioned groups of roaming bandits in the Four Crafts. I can know, I have been riding around a lot these last days, and I talked to many people. I had the impression I was completely safe at Westdorp Manor! Don't leave the castle so often, keep your guards inside. Have you really no idea who the attackers might be?'

'No, I haven't! I came in conflict with families of Ghent who tried to buy polders like I did, on the western side of the Scheldt, south of Antwerp, but we merely competed with money and cunning, not with arms. I have been much occupied with the trade of my peat lately, and my grain harvests are booming, but I cannot imagine where or how or for what reason I might have made deadly enemies in the Four Crafts or in the Land of Waas. I only did business here, ruthless maybe, but only business.'

'Envy is a powerful motive for hatred, Jehan. Find out who envies you.'

'Yes, I'll do that,' I replied. 'I am constantly looking out for who might wish me harm, to me or to the people of Terhagen, but I found out nothing so far. The abbess of Ter Hage is helping me with that too.'

Quintine seemed suddenly very interested in her fingernails.

'Mother Amalberga? How is she? Now, there is a truly holy woman! I must pay her a visit, soon.'

'Amalberga is fine,' I smiled. 'I was able to help her to some Pharaïldis money. She told me she knew you.'

'We met,' was all Quintine wanted to confess on the subject of the nuns of Ter Hage, and I didn't pursue.

We held a pause, lost in thoughts, and then Quintine whispered, 'I shall come to New Terhagen one of these days to talk to Wivine. I may also soon have to return to Ghent, for this manor is Martin's and Avezoete's property. If Martin will be working with you, he will want a house of his own, and I don't think he will like to return to Ghent. He is nice, courageous, Jehan. He shows daring, dash, but he is not anymore the fuller his father and forefathers were. He walks with knights and magnates, adopts their way of talking and of holding his head. He has a good heart, but he is not a fuller anymore. He is lost to Ghent!'

'As so many of us are these days,' I sighed.

'I know all that,' I continued, 'and he is therefore exactly the kind of man I need for the time being, the right kind of man to inspire confidence, authority, charisma, charm and respect. We own dispersed lands, Quintine, even more than a few of lords of the castellanies around Ghent own. Our ways of growing in land and in money, our ways of managing our estates in the country, are the same as a lord of a large *Ambacht* should apply. Only very few lords manage so well as we do, and as I hope Martin will learn soon. I shall have to be ruthless with him, push his young, careless recklessness out of him, but he'll learn!'

I stayed three heavenly days at Westdorp Manor, and most of that time we spent in bed. I had to return to New Terhagen, lest Mathis would send out search parties for me. Quintine agreed. I rode away from her around noon, promising to be back soon.

\*\*\*\*\*

Three days after my return, Quintine Denout, red hair flaming around her pretty face, dressed as a squire, riding a heavy horse one would have expected only a strong, grown-up man could master, long sword at her side, entered into New Terhagen. She rode up to the gate of New Terhagen.

Ywen de Wilde stood on the tower at that moment. He blew his horn to announce a visitor, but seeing only one rider, he opened the gate, and his mouth fell open when he observed Quintine was not a man. One woman on a horse could not represent a grave danger to us. I was in the courtyard of the castle, waiting with spread legs, fists tight in my waist, dagger at my belt, wondering who had come to our peaceful house, when I saw the red manes and recognised Quintine. My heart began to beat faster, for I knew why she had come and I dreaded the confrontation. Quintine rode quickly up to me, held her horse only in right in front of me. I could tell she was in a prickly mood.

She lost no words.

‘Hello, Jehan. Nice day. Is Wivine in?’ she spat at me, and I thought she was as nervous as I. ‘She is,’ I grinned, a little startled, ‘but maybe I should talk to her first, kind of introducing you.’

‘No,’ Quintine refused pertly. ‘When I come to talk, I talk, no one else. Where is she?’

‘She might be in the great hall to the left of the entrance, maybe in the kitchen. You won’t need that sword, dear,’ I said rapidly, and stretched my hand to receive reins and weapon. Quintine grinned back this time, quick-witted as usual, ‘I wouldn’t harm my sister, Jehan, and I know how to curb my temper. I won’t hurt her, at least, not physically! I won’t poke out her eyes!’

She did unbuckle her belt, though, and surrendered her sword. I had seen Quintine fight with a sword against my guards, only in training, but she was very quick with a blade, and I feared her temper. She was a little impulsive when angered and prone to flaring up suddenly, my Quintine, however sweet and soft she seemed. I forgot I had thought her how to kill with hands alone. I took the reins of her horse, and the belt with her sword, and before I could look again at Quintine, she was running up the steps of the manor and pushed open the panels of the door, shouting, ‘Wivine, sister, Wivine, where are you? I, Quintine, have come to talk to you!’

I brought the horse to the stables, unsaddled it, but left it at a heap of hay without further bothering about it. I went back in the courtyard, but remained standing at the stairs to my door.

Everdey passed by me, a crossbow in his hand, and he must have seen Quintine arrive, for he mentioned, ‘strange new fashion for ladies to dress these days!’

Everdey walked from right to left about the courtyard, looking anxiously at me, no doubt noticing how nervous I stood there, doing nothing, which I hated. I felt myself shrivelling with shame.

What happened next has always seemed to me the most improbable and weirdest thing that could have happened in my life.

When Everdey had passed by me, we heard shouts in the hall, two women’s voices calling and screaming. The screams startled Everdey. He looked back at me, but I made a slow gesture with my hand, indicating him to continue what he had been doing, and not bother. He went on, came back, disappeared in a door on the other side.

The voices rang higher.

Kateline, Ywen’s wife, and Marie, Everdey’s wife, burst out of the kitchen of their quarters. Anna, Mathis’s wife, stood already in the door of the washhouse. The women had been attracted by the noise. They looked at me interrogatingly. I shook my shoulders. The women in my castle were not used to hearing the sounds of quarrelling at New Terhagen. I used both arms to wave them back to their duties.

Two seconds later, Arent, Everdey's son of eight came standing next to me. He grabbed my hand. He remained at my side, and then also Kerstiaen, Ywen's son, ran to my other side. He also took my hand. I found them sweet. They were not used to in-fighting. They had come to encourage me.

Imagine the scene! I stood there, beneath the stairs of my own door and house, flanked by two small boys, who ostensibly thus showed their support for me in masculine solidarity, as if they wanted to inspire me with bravery. I found I was not a little ridiculous, but I dared not rush into the house. When I looked behind me, I saw heads hidden behind open doors and faces gleaming behind windows.

The screaming went on for a while in my hall. Gradually, the voices sounded less shrill and forceful. Then, I thought I heard crying, loud and angry still, and then only silence. I stepped forward one step, but the boys drew on my hands. They were a little afraid, and their pressure meant something like, 'do not interfere in women's affairs!' Did everybody in my castle know what was going on in my hall, even the children?

I searched my mind, but no, in my hall hung no swords or daggers or axes. Our weapons hung in the other room.

I sent Arent and Kerstiaen back to their mother and to their games, telling them all would be fine, now. They ran off, looking back sceptically over their shoulders as they disappeared in the kitchen, where arms grabbed them, heads not showing.

I remained in the courtyard for quite a long time, wondering what the two sisters were telling to each other. I must have waited longer than two hours, so agonisingly long I decided there and then to buy me one of those giant clocks that could be obtained in Ghent, and hang one on the façade of one of the living quarters of the castle, facing the courtyard. By then, I sat on the stairs leading to the doors of my manor, the lord of the castle cast out, enjoying the sweet attention of all the children of New Terhagen, who had escaped once more the hold of their mothers. I didn't think the faces of the women behind the windows lent me much sympathy. Was it because I respected the Denout twins or because I was such a damn coward when it came to women that I did not enter the house earlier?

Finally, the door opened. The boys and girls, who had neared, scrambled away and disappeared. They too feared the scorn of one of the Denout ladies! Quintine made her appearance at the door, red-eyed, still weeping tears from her face, still snivelling and breathing heavily, blowing her nose. She winked at me, inviting me in. Behind her stood Wivine, equally red-eyed, giving me hard, reproaching glances. We went to the hall and sat, both girls on one side of the table, I prudently behind the other.

I thought, 'so, it isn't sister against sister anymore, but two sisters against me. Had they agreed on what scum I was? What should I expect?'

Quintine spoke.

'We have discussed about you, Wivine and I. We both acknowledge you are a bastard, but we both love you. Your marriage to Wivine cannot be undone and surely, you must feel for her. It seems you feel a lot for her in bed. Wivine slept with you because she loves you and wanted you, although she knew I craved for you. She doesn't want to live alone, without you. Neither do I.'

'Do I have a word in this?' I interrupted.

'No, you haven't, darling,' Quintine continued. 'We have come to a decision. As I said, your marriage to Wivine must continue by divine law, but I love you and don't want to give you up. I'm selfish, you see. I love you too, and I suppose you love me in your own truly selfish way. If Wivine wants you, I want you too.'

How hard they were on me! What would they do next? Tear me in two?

‘So, hear what we shall do! I will come to live at New Terhagen, and so will remain Wivine. We shall have separate rooms. Wivine will be your legal wife in all, and you’ll honour her. I shall come to live here, as your wife of heart. We shall keep the peace. If there will be children, which I very dearly hope, they will be cared for by the three of us.’

I shook my head. ‘That cannot be! I cannot live with two women at the same time!’

‘Of course you can, darling, and you must. You will find it very agreeable, in the end. We shall keep the peace, Wivine has pledged to peace and quiet, and not be jealous. We, Wivine and I, will get what we can from you, and you shall respect us both. You can take this proposal or leave it and make us all miserable, and if you leave it you should consider never seeing either of us ever again, for I shall not allow my sister to remain with you alone, nor can I allow my sister to be miserable for the rest of her life without you. We share, or we lose everything, the three of us. Think about it. It is a reasonable proposal, a little unusual, but feasible if we love each other. Wivine and I are not twins for nothing, you see.’

I did consider the proposal in earnest. I frowned my forehead, and thought. I loved Quintine, but the truth was I had been fearing how hard it would be to abandon Wivine’s sexual prowess and her tantalising, luscious body. I was so ashamed to want to keep both worlds, but would have given up Wivine for her sister if I had to, not the contrary. I liked Wivine, her sweetness, her joy, her sensuality. The sisters offered their souls and bodies at the same time. I was but a weak man, and the bible already stated the flesh was weak. I was no saint.

‘Are you absolutely sure you agree to this scheme, Wivine?’ I asked feebly, surrendering already.

‘Of course she is,’ Quintine answered, and Wivine nodded. ‘Would we be us to joke about something like this? It is a grave matter in the eyes of the church to live like this, Jehan, but the sin and the joys shall be shared. We must not expect forgiveness from the church, but maybe God in heaven will forgive our sins of love!’

I nodded. I did not really want to lose Wivine, certainly not Quintine, I wanted to keep Wivine and I loved Quintine. It was all so confusing! What cruel destiny would have separated me from Quintine? I nodded, acquiesced. I would not sail against the wind and there was no sense whimpering about what they had agreed.

‘Yes,’ I agreed. ‘We’ll live together, then. I’m not sure it will work out fine, without fights, but we can try. I love you too much to be separated from you and to make you miserable.’ I didn’t specify who I meant by ‘you’, which made them both startle a little, but they too nodded in unison.

That was how I, Jehan Terhagen, came to live with the twin sisters Wivine and Quintine Denout in the same house. We lived as husband and wife. I had only one legal wife, Wivine, but Quintine lived with me as if she too was my wife. We rearranged the rooms. We slept in different bedrooms, and never slept the three of us together in one bed. We were not much for orgies together. In fact, most of my nights I slept alone. Still, our castle remained a house of love.

Martin Denout and Avezoete van Lake moved to Westdorp, Quintine moved to New Terhagen. Officially, she was the sister of the Lady of Terhagen, who had come to live with her sister and her brother-in-law. Informally, I sought more the company, the advice and the soul’s congeniality of Quintine. Once every while however, when Wivine ogled me, and I remarked she needed me in her bed, we enjoyed the ecstasy, the raptures of physical love. We warmed each other in winter and were sweet towards the world.

I am fairly certain the families who lived with us at Terhagen, Old and New, the Handscoemakeres, the Wildes and the Noortkerkes, as much as the Christiaens, the Metsers and the Dorps, gossiped about us but also protected us from the people beyond Terhagen. They might have grumbled, and indeed they looked awkwardly and disapprovingly at me the first months, more than once, but I guess the women talked them down, showing more compassion and comprehension than the men. After those first months, the situation, however awkward, was accepted by everyone without afterthoughts. Wivine, Quintine and I avoided showing our feelings ostentatiously in public, also within our castle. Our relations to the Pharaïldis families remained somewhat strained. We never told them how we really lived, but I suppose they knew, deep in their hearts. We never told the families how matters stood really ourselves, though at least Martin must have noticed how familiar I spoke and acted with Quintine.

Martin learned the truth when Quintine became pregnant, gave birth to a son we called William. Yes, the boy was inscribed in the books of the parishes of Axel under my family name. It cost me a lot of money to priests who might not sit at the right side of God in heaven, but I got the name of my son inscribed under my own, and with the mother being Quintine Denout. Quintine or Wivine, the priests couldn't make out the difference anyway, and the family name of the mother was Denout, wasn't it? The Pharaïldis families assumed the mother of the children was Wivine. We had two more daughters later on, Quintine and I, Selie and Kerstin. These first names were famous in the Denout family. The Pharaïldis forgave me reluctantly, but silently.

And so we lived on, the happy three of us, at New Terhagen.

## Chapter 4. The French Inheritance. Spring 1351 – Winter 1356

### Dark Clouds gathering

Neither King Edward III of England nor King John II of France were eager to take up arms until long after the pestilence devastation. Their countries needed to adjust to the losses of the deadly sickness that had decimated the people and shook the economy of the lands. Merchants had died and had to be replaced, lords of the countryside had perished and left their domains without leader.

King Edward III held his first parliament since three years in February of 1351. He asked for additional funding of his armies. He obtained the new taxes because the truce with France would end. The additional income solved his financial issues. He also daubed his son Lionel of Antwerp earl of Ulster and his other son, John of Gaunt, a handsome, strong youth, earl of Richmond.

In April, John II made a serious effort to modernise the organisation of his army by a comprehensive Royal Ordinance. He fixed new rates for his warriors, raising the money the men-at-arms would receive per day of campaign to wages which were more in line with the rises in the prices of food and lodging after the pestilence. The king also stipulated every warrior would be subordinate to a captain in the battles. The men were to take an oath they would not desert from the group of their captain without a direct order, and that on penalty of death. The men were not to withdraw at will. They would have to fight until the bitter end, or until allowed by the captains to retreat. These rules remained quite ineffective, however, for the time being, because King John II simply lacked the money to pay his men-at-arms and to install the captains. John II then resorted to the old remedy of devaluating the coinage. He re-minted gold and silver coins with lower proportions of gold and silver, but put back into circulation these coins at the old value. With time the trick was discovered, and for a certain value more new coins were asked, so that further devaluations of coinage had to be effected. The common people got paid in the new French coins to the same amount as before, so they suffered most from the rising prices. The wealthy kept to their Italian coinage, the ducats and the florins, and to their golden and silver plates, vases, vessels and solid metal bars. The wealthy were less affected by the devaluations and learned to react faster. In 1351 alone, the French coinage was thus diminished in value eighteen times.

Also Louis of Male, count of Flanders, used this subterfuge to diminish his debts, but in a more controlled and lesser extent.

In that same month of April of 1351, the war for Brittany continued unabatedly. A French force lead by Robert de Beaumanoir attacked the English garrison of Ploërmel. The English commander of the garrison, Sir Richard Bramborough, suggested to avoid a generalised bloodbath by having a gallant combat, a tournament, of thirty French knights against thirty English noblemen. The French accepted, and the tournament took place, against all odds. He battle was fierce. The French prevailed. Every knight on either side was wounded, Richard Bramborough and eight English knights were killed. Ploërmel did not surrender to the French, however, but great honour had been won by the French.

The diplomatic efforts of Count Louis of Male, count of Flanders, to reconcile with the new French king succeeded already in the summer of 1351. Louis was received with open arms by

John II. He received a yearly stipend of two thousand ducats to relinquish the allegiance of Flanders to England. The militia and leaders of the towns of Flanders had been silenced by then, so Louis of Male could speak again for his county with authority. He also had the tomb of his father, Louis de Nevers, who had fallen at Crécy, transferred from the abbey of Saint-Ricquier in France to the church of Saint Donatius in Bruges. The new burial was quite symbolic for Flanders, for Louis of Male indicated strongly the counts of Flanders of his lineages were linked in the first place to Flanders, less to France. Louis thus always kept a balance between the various influences in his county.

The year of 1350 had been a year of bad harvests. Not enough grain could be bought in Picardy for Ghent, and the Ghent merchants sold what they bought at high prices to Bruges and Brabant. The grain price had almost doubled in Ghent, and Louis's devaluations of coinage had further diminished the buying power of the poor, so famine threatened for the poorer classes. Louis's court councillors and also the Pharaïldis men, suspected the lords and the abbeys of the countryside top have hoarded barley, rye and other grains in hidden storage. At the end of 1352, therefore, Louis of Male ordered the bailiff of Ghent to ride in force to the castellanies of the environs. The bailiff and the representatives of the aldermen of Ghent were to search the castles, abbeys, manors and barns for hidden storage of grain. The grain was to be brought to the markets of the town.

Louis of Male had also sought an alternative in Ghent for the *Gravensteen* as the place where he could reside in his main town of Flanders. He found what he sought in *the Ser Sanders Wal*, a large site where the former ruwaard of Flanders, Simon van Halen-Mirabello had his manor. This site lay conveniently not far from the *Gravensteen*, on the other side of the Lieve Canal and of the *Betsgravenbrug*, and it was a green site with lots of open space, north of the *Burgstraat*. Simon had been murdered, and the family sought to sell the property. Louis of Male had insisted to buy that terrain for a new palace. The family of van Halen was connected to him, he knew the family well, for Simon had married a bastard sister of Louis of Nevers, a bastard aunt of Louis of Male.

When the sale of the domain was finished, Louis of Male saw several architects. Louis had the castle of Tervuren in his mind, a fortress, but he wanted something lighter and more elegant, no place that would scare the Gentenaars away. He settled for a square castle, walled all around and surrounded with a broad moat for protection, with a manor, the residence of the count, at the far end of a vast inner yard. He wanted very many rooms for his guests. Near the manor would be a chapel, and various other buildings at the two other sides of the square. Two towers, among which one very high guard-tower would be built near the manor, but that tower should not be seen as a threat, and therefore also be rather slim and elegant. Louis wanted a beautiful garden, a pleasure garden, and a long, covered terrain to practice with crossbows and bows. He asked three drawbridges over the water of the moat. This was the place where he could invite Heyla de Smet to dwell with him when he was at Ghent. The construction of the new count's residence in Ghent could begin in 1353.

In Brabant, a crisis of succession to the duchy loomed. In 1352 died Godfrey, the last son of the duke of Brabant. The duke's daughter, Joanna, married to Count Wenceslas of Luxemburg, was designated by the magistrates as heir to Brabant. Joanna's husband was the brother of Emperor Charles IV of the Holy Roman Empire of Germany, a powerful personality. The duke of Brabant's other daughter, Mary, was unable to reign, for seriously handicapped by hydropsy. The duke's third daughter, Margaret, was of course married to Count Louis of Male of Flanders.

Louis had still not cashed in on the dowry for his wife, and he felt obfuscated because the designation of heiress of Brabant of Joanna had been arranged without his consent. He now claimed the hundred thousand écus d'or of dowry, demanding the rights on the town of Mechelen. Louis of Male had heard the advice of the Pharaïldis men concerning the Scheldt Stream, the main artery by which Ghent gained wealth from commerce. He was trying to win dominance over the wide river. Louis sought extensive claims on the duchy of Brabant. It became clear to the Pharaïldis men the count of Flanders tried not only to win the Scheldt, but also complete rights on the duchy of Brabant in the name of his wife, Margaret of Brabant. Louis of Male wanted to be called duke of Brabant, as well as count of Flanders, Nevers and Rethel!

In Holland, the war between the Hooks, the partisans of Countess Margaret of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland on the one side, and the Cods, the partisans of Margaret's son William, earlier instated as her representative while she resided with her husband who had become Emperor, raged on. King Edward III of England first sided with Margaret, for his wife Philippa was from Hainault and thus family of Margaret. He won for Margaret the naval battle of Vere in 1351 against the Cods. Later, however, the Hooks and the English were defeated dishonourably by the troops of William at the Battle of Vlaardinghen. Soon, Edward III changed sides, but negotiated with both parties. His efforts reached a conclusion only in 1354, when William received the title of Count of Holland and Zeeland in full rule, whereas Margaret could continue to rule over Hainault. In July 1356, when Margaret had died, William became the fifth Count of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland.

The intricacies of the links and relations between the noble houses of Europe were illustrated once more with this Count William of Hainault, for he was married to Mathilda or Maud of Lancaster, daughter of the duke of Lancaster and best friend of King Edward III. Later still, in 1359, Maud's sister, Blanche of Lancaster, would marry John of Gaunt, the son of Edward III who had been born in Ghent and whose godfather had been James van Artevelde. John of Gaunt became the later duke of Lancaster after the death of his father-in-law. Margaret of Hainault, the mother of William, was the sister of Queen Philippa of England, wife of Edward III.

John II of France had heard of the success in binding the nobility to the king by the installation of King Edward III of the Order of the Garter. He liked the upsurge of chivalry brought about by the order. John II held the opening ceremony of his own chivalric order, the Order of the Star, in January of 1352. This order was to have five hundred members, many more than the Order of the Garter. The standard of the Star was to be a red banner with stars and the image of the Virgin, indicating the title of 'Stella Maris' of Our Lady. The knights of the Star were to wear a white tunic and a red or white surcoat embroidered with a golden star. The knights received from the king a special, enamelled ring, and they took to wearing a red hat, gilded shoes and black hoses. John II made them take an oath never to flee from battle. He did not want another debacle as at Crécy, where at a crucial moment thousands of French knights and their men-at-arms had suddenly left the battlefield. Thus, both King Edward III of England and King John II of France prepared for war.

In February of 1352, the war between France and England threatened to resume. The English had broken the truce! An English squire, John Dancaster, had attacked the castle of Guines, the impregnable fortress of only six miles from Calais. The knight had taken this very strongly defended fortress by surprise, climbed over the walls with a few men, opened the

gates, and swamped the defenders. It was an act of particular courage and daring, but it meant a break in the truce and an offence to France.

King Edward III knew very well Dancaster had recklessly broken the truce, but he decided to keep the castle! The French reaction was immediate, and the French armies assembled.

One army was formed at Rennes under Guy de Nesle, targeting once more Ploërmel. The other assembled at Saintes, the third near Guines under Geoffrey de Charny. This last army attacked Guines, but it was repelled again and again by the English garrison in the fortress, helped by additional troops from Calais.

In Brittany, on the fourteenth of August of 1352, the French Marshal Guy de Nesle gave a major battle to the English troops led by Sir Walter Bentley. In the beginning of the year, some of the Marshal Guy de Nesle's troops had already been ambushed by an English force. The French knights then had refused to retreat, and were butchered. About a hundred French knights lost their lives in that major skirmish. The battle of August was fought very bloody. The English, though fighting with much less men, won a great and bloody victory. A large number of French knights, many of the members of the Order of the Star, had been killed in the effort.

Pope Clement VI, the pope who had proclaimed the jubilee year of 1350, died in December of 1352. His successor was once more a French cardinal, Etienne Aubert, who took the name of Innocent VI. In April of the next year, Innocent sent his legate Guy de Boulogne to negotiate for peace between France and England, but he met little success in England.

Real negotiations between the two kingdoms started only seriously in the spring of 1354, at Guines. The bishop of Norwich and the earl of Huntingdon represented King Edward. Astonishingly, the French and English delegates reached an agreement! King Edward III was to end the war, abandon his claim on the throne of France, but he received in compensation the total sovereignty over vast territories, over Aquitaine, the Poitou and Limousin regions, over lands along the Loire River, and he could keep the lands around Calais. The king of England did not have to hold these lands any longer in feudal fief from the king of France! This was of course contrary to all long-term strategic views of generations of kings of France, whose policy had always been to add regions to their royal domains instead of losing them. The treaty was provisional. It had to be ratified by the pope and by the two kings. The pope ratified it in October of 1354. At the beginning of 1355, King John II refused to sign the treaty, choosing war over peace, refusing to hand over so much territory of what he considered to be his. The truce begun during the plague was nevertheless prolonged until November of 1354.

In Ghent, the hard taxes on the weavers, installed after their revolt against the count, and the restrictions on the weaving craft weighed heavily on the main artisans of the town, whose production ultimately served the wealth of the city. The Pharaïldis men considered the oppression of the weavers, maybe or even probably politically justified after the uprisings of the guild against the count, as something like the slaughtering of the Golden Calf. They tried to influence Louis of Male during their informal meetings with the count at Beoostenblijje. They proposed to slacken the oppressive measures. Count Louis of Male still feared the power of the weavers in his Flemish cities. He feared there was still strong sympathy among the weavers for the English influence, whereas he had reconciled with the king of France. He sought normal, peaceful relationships with Edward III, but needed distance with England at that moment. Louis knew by instinct the weavers could be a real danger for his knights and for the old lineages in the cities of Flanders, and thus for the peace in the county. He had not yet a good understanding of how the economy of a country worked, so he underestimated the

departure of many weavers from Flanders. He remained obstinately reluctant to change anything of substance in the present status of equilibrium between the classes in Flanders, and therefore in the status of the weavers. The statute whereby it was forbidden for the weavers to own more than two looms remained in effect, and the taxes on apprentices, which were too high for some masters and would ultimately lead to less master weavers, remained in effect. Count Louis of Male asked for patience to the Pharaïldis men. The weavers therefore continued to leave Ghent, not in mass, but in a steady drain. Ghent also had to face competition from the weavers of the smaller towns, who produced better quality cloth in greater quantities. Weavers of Ghent moved to those towns, where conditions were less harsh, or to England, where King Edward urged local lords to receive them with open arms.

In June of 1353, Edward III, reacting on Louis of Male's reconciliation with France, transferred the wool staple from Bruges to Westminster. Much later, in 1363, the wool staple would be re-installed closer to Flanders, but still in English-held territory, at Calais. Once more the provisioning of Flanders with wool was at risk, but continued unabatedly. Count Louis of Male began to look for alternative sources of wool, but except for the cheaper kinds of less quality, such wool was not to be found on the continent. The Flemish weavers also faced increased competition from Brabant and Hainault, and from Italian weavers. This last competition was helped by the Lombard traders of Flanders who dealt for a large proportion of the cloth commerce.

The Pharaïldis men perceived this evolution clearly, tried to explain how the economy of Ghent worked, worried, but the count found the balance of forces currently in place more important. He was glad with the peace and with his growing influence. This was not a time for drastic changes, he argued. The Pharaïldis men warned the count that with time, these issues would lead to violent revolts in Flanders.

The issue with the weaving industry in Flanders came indeed to an outburst of violence in a new uprising of the weavers in Ghent, supported by some of the small guilds. This happened in the spring of 1353. The uprising was a spontaneous one. The weavers could not organise well, as they had remained without a dean, led by a director who was a member of the other guilds, so the revolt remained confused, chaotic, and limited to much shouting, assembly of groups of men in the streets of Ghent, but of little threatening effect. The count's men-at-arms riding with the bailiff from out of the *Gravensteen*, accompanied by the men-at-arms of the knights and the aldermen of the old lineages, broke the uprising quickly and efficiently. A few hotheads were imprisoned. The dean of the smaller guilds involved in the plot, Lammerecht van Tideghem, was exiled. This limited flaring up of dissent and violence in Ghent in the spring of 1353 was only a feeble forebode of the massacres and uprisings caused by the wrath of the people after the plague in other countries, and especially in England and France. In England, a first riot broke out among the students at the university of Oxford. The students were butchered by the men-at-arms of the earls of England, and the university temporarily closed.

In France, the major internal source of unrest was caused by one particular person only, by Charles the Bad, king of Navarre. Charles de Navarre's mother was the daughter of king Louis X of France, who had died in 1316, so Charles was nearer in succession even than her aunt Isabella and hence Edward III. Charles's parents had accepted Philip VI of Valois as king, however, and received the kingdom of Navarre in return, but Charles, always a plotter and an intrepid intriguer, bold and reckless, saw his chance with whom he thought was a weak king, with John II. Navarre resented as much as Edward III the house of Valois on the throne of France. At the beginning of 1354, he was merely twenty-two years old, but he and his

brother Philip started a campaign of sowing dissent in France. They considered John II a feeble king, who might be toppled or discredited. They began by fomenting murder. They lured the constable of France, Charles of Spain, who was Don Carlos de la Cerda, one of the prime confidants of King John II, into their territories in Normandy, where they allowed him to be killed by Jean d'Harcourt. Charles expected the nobles of France who hated Don Carlos and despised John II to take his side, but this did not materialise. King John II declared the Norman properties of Charles de Navarre forfeited, but John would have to raise an army to force this issue, which did not happen, for John was still desperately looking for more money at that time.

Charles de Navarre then turned to England, an act of high treason in France, but he reconciled a little later with King John. By appealing to Pope Innocent VI, Charles obtained that John II handed back to him his Norman fiefs, and John pardoned him for the murder of Don Carlos. The peace between the two men was restored for a while in the spring of 1354, but Charles had no intention of leaving matters rest. Charles de Navarre would remain a long nail in the coffin of John II!

In January of 1355, negotiations between the ambassadors of France and England continued in the pope's city of Avignon. It became quite clear John II was obstinate and did not agree with the handing over of so extensive domains of the continent out of feudal fiefdom to Edward III. The Treaty of Guines was never ratified. This meant the long talks, interminable conferences, meetings and negotiations for the peace, which had been going on from April of 1353 to this February of 1355, had resulted in simply nothing tangible. Merely an extension of the truce until Midsummer Day, twenty-one June of that year of 1355, was agreed upon.

The organisation of the war resumed in earnest. Edward III appointed his friend, the duke of Lancaster, as his leader in Normandy. His son and heir Edward of Woodstock, the prince of Wales, would take command of the English army in Gascony, even though Edward would later be called to lead in Brittany. The Prince of Wales was assisted by the earls of Salisbury, Suffolk, Warwick and Oxford, and also by Sir Reginald Cobham, a veteran war commander. He received about a thousand men-at-arms, two thousand archers, and a Welsh contingent of warriors.

In France, the Estates-general agreed to pay for an army of thirty thousand men-at-arms for a period of one year. The Estates demanded that these funds be administered by a committee of counsellors from among their members. In May, with this grant, John II sent out the *arrière-ban* letters to gather all men-at-arms owed to him feudally in his realm. By November of 1355, King John II had almost assembled his army.

The duke of Lancaster and King Edward III landed at Calais in that same beginning of November of 1355 with an army of about three thousand mounted archers and two thousand archers on foot. This army rode and marched out to give battle to the army of King John II. It moved to Normandy first, to link with troops of Charles de Navarre. A volunteer contingent of militiamen from Flanders and Brabant joined them, so Edward's army finally numbered about ten thousand men. The English and allied armies moved to Amiens, raiding Artois and Picardy, hoping to provoke John II into giving battle in the plains of Picardy. The French troops had indeed, as often, assembled at Amiens.

On the sixth of November, however, Scottish troops, with some French aid, attacked the town of Berwick and destroyed it. Edward III had to hurry back to England to face the Scottish danger. The king was thus restrained from giving battle in the winter of 1355 to 1356 in

France. Edward and the duke of Lancaster returned mid-November to England, leaving their troops at Calais.

John II also avoided battle with the English.

King Edward III fought a successful campaign in Scotland, which has been called the ‘Burnt Candlemas’ campaign, against the troops of Robert Stewart. This proved a very destructive invasion of Scotland, a punitive expedition launched from out of Roxburgh. The English king burnt himself a path through south-eastern Scotland, through Lothian, in a ten-day *chevauchée* destroying the towns of Haddington and Edinburgh. The raid was very violent and destructive, sparing of atrocities neither the land nor the people. The Scottish leaders had no effective answer to the English army of men-at-arms and especially not to the English archers. Edward III afterwards allowed negotiations to be held with the Scottish nobles, which resulted in a peace treaty and the return of King David II as king of Scotland in 1357.

King Edward thus avoided further skirmishes and battles in Scotland, so that he had his hands free to resume the war in France. The king had no financial worries for his campaigns, for at the end of November of 1355, the English parliament granted him a special subsidy on all wool and leather exports for the next six years.

King John II in the meantime, bowed under severe financial issues! Early 1356, he was virtually all but bankrupt. He had even more serious worries. In October of 1355, Prince Edward, oldest son of Edward III, the Prince of Wales, had launched his raid out of Bordeaux with an army on horseback of somewhat more than two thousand five hundred men-at-arms. He wreaked havoc in French royal territories such as Limoux, Narbonne, Castelnaudry and Montpellier. He plundered the Armagnac region with an army that had been added to by his Gascon allies to about nine thousand warriors. Carcassonne was plundered for three days, but the citadel left untouched. French troops of Gaston Phoebus of Foix harried the English troops in his back, so Prince Edward preferred to return to Bordeaux for the winter. The prince’s principal ally was the Gascon Captal de Buch. The campaign of the prince of Wales had been more of a punitive *chevauchée* than an attack with the aim of gaining an everlasting advantage over the French king. It proved merely an annoyance to France, not a decisive campaign that changed the balance of forces or of views.

Charles of Navarre remained a constant pain for King John II. In December of 1355, a plot by Charles to have King John killed failed, but in the months thereafter, Charles plotted with the dauphin, John II’s son and heir, against the king of France. John II decided for a sudden operation.

In April of 1356, having heard of a meeting between Charles de Navarre and the dauphin, King John II arrived unexpectedly in the hall of Rouen where Charles and the dauphin were holding a banquet with Norman nobles. King John arrested everybody present in the hall. He beheaded four knights for treason, and imprisoned Charles of Navarre in the Paris Châtelet. John d’Harcourt, Colin Doublel and two other Norman knights were killed. Meanwhile, the French army gathered at Chartres to meet the English troops.

In July of 1356, the duke of Lancaster landed with his army at Cherbourg on the French coast. By the end of August, he marched with six thousand men-at-arms from Brittany to Normandy, to be joined by the supporters of Charles de Navarre. Their aim was to attack the Angevin territory and to form the link with the troops of the prince of Wales, who was marching north from Gascony.

Edward, Prince of Wales, campaigned from out of Bergerac to the region of Limoges and Bourges, northwards. The English prince took the castle of Romorantin, marched on to Tours on the Loire, and destroyed the suburbs of that city. The prince of Wales had to retreat from Tours, because King John's troops hurried to him from Chartres, outnumbering him several times. This French army, led by King John and by his two war-marshals, with the knights of twenty-six counts and dukes and their lesser lords, amounted to about sixteen thousand men-at-arms, twice as large now as the English army of the prince of Wales. It crossed the Loire at Orléans on eight September of 1356, moving at great speed towards the army of Prince Edward. The aim of King John II was to defeat both parts of the total English army separately, before these could join. A major battle was in the making!

In Flanders, Count Louis of Male had been pursuing in 1355 his efforts to control the Scheldt River. He posted claims on the town of Mechelen, and obtained in July of 1355 the help of King John II to buy the castellany of Dendermonde from the lord of Amboise. John II was pleased with Louis of Male, especially because the count of Flanders had promised to marry his daughter, Margaret of Male, to Philip de Rouvre, duke of Burgundy, and not to an English lord. For this French marriage, King John II renounced on the right to put Flanders under the interdict, and John even obtained from Pope Innocent VI a bull revoking the power of interdict for the French kings, something the previous popes had consistently refused to abandon in the interest of France.

At that time, Louis of Male's daughter Margaret, born in 1350, was his only legal child and many suspected no more legal children would come, for the marriage of Louis was not happy. The marriage of Margaret to Philip de Rouvre, duke of Burgundy, was to take place in 1357, when she would be seven. Philip de Rouvre, born in 1346, would then be eleven years old, and when the marriage was concluded, he was merely nine years old. Philip's father had died young, but his mother Joanna governed in his place over Burgundy until Philip would be of age. The marriage between the two children was purely a matter of state.

The major event that would affect Flanders in this period happened in her eastern neighbour, not in France, but in Brabant.

Duke John III of Brabant died on the fifth of December of 1355. Heiress of Brabant was Joanna, daughter of the duke, married to Duke Wenceslas of Luxemburg, brother to the German Emperor Charles. The two other sons-in-law of John III, the counts of Flanders and Guelders, immediately contested this arrangement.

The claims of Count Reginald of Guelders on Brabant were rapidly solved. Reginald, married to Mary of Brabant, knew his chances feeble. He settled for the castellany of Turnhout and a large sum of money, abandoning his demands on Brabant.

On the fifteenth of June of 1356, however, Count Louis of Male declared war on Joanna of Brabant and Wenceslas of Luxemburg. He argued the dowry for his wife Margaret had never been paid by Brabant, and he wrote that no agreement on the succession of Brabant had been signed by the three contestants, the three daughters of John II and their husbands.

Count Louis of Male assembled his army of Flanders on the eighteenth of June. The city of Ghent gave the count more than seven thousand militiamen, more than five thousand men from the small guilds and about two thousand from the fullers' guild! The weavers' guild, unorganised, did not participate in the expedition Louis of Male was about to launch against Brabant.

On the eighteenth of June already, three days after his declaration of war, Count Louis of Male set his considerable army of more than ten thousand men on the march. He brought it to near the abbey of Affligem, where on the nineteenth June he stood before the smaller army of Wenceslas, who had brought his men to Asse. Louis of Male's representatives and delegates of Brabant negotiated to avoid a pitched battle. Wenceslas promised to hand over the city of Mechelen to Flanders. Louis of Male, satisfied with the easy success, retired to his domains of Male and demobilised his troops. Flanders and Brabant sighed with relief.

The agreement to hand over Mechelen was, however, rejected by the Duchess Joanna, and also refused by the aldermen of Brussels and Leuven, by the men from the ancient lineages who ruled these most important Brabant cities. The aldermen arrested the negotiators of Brabant and excluded duke Wenceslas from further negotiations with Flanders. In Brabant, the power of the cities was still very important. On the fifteenth July of 1356, therefore, the temporary peace seemed shattered.

Louis of Male had to resume the war! He first targeted Antwerp, another town on the Scheldt he had coveted. On the seventh of August, a Flemish fleet blockaded Antwerp and the siege of the town began by one thousand Flemish men-at-arms who disembarked from the ships. Villages in the environs such as Lillo, Oorderen and Coustelle were destroyed. On the ninth of August then, Louis of Male's army marched over the border into Brabant.

Dark clouds of death and destruction were gathering over France and the Low Countries once again.

In France, a major battle threatened between the armies of France and England. In Flanders, the War of Succession for Brabant was on its way. The severe hardships of the plague wave seemed forgotten.

\*\*\*\*\*

'Who does he man think he is? Is he Alexander the Great or the emperor of Constantinople? Is his mind blocked by delusions of grandeur? Is his name not long enough? Louis of Male, count of Flanders, count of Nevers, count of Rethel, count of Artois, and now duke of Brabant? How much sorrow is this man going to cause in Flanders, in the dead men hacked to pieces on the atrocious battlefield? What serious claim has he on the lands of Brabant? His wife was not the eldest daughter of the former duke! What a disaster for Duke John that his three sons died so soon! The better claim comes from the brother of the German emperor! Does Male think the emperor will let him gobble up Brabant, he a feudal servant of the king of France? He may cause a war between the emperor of Germany and the king of France! Is he daft?' Gillis Vresele shouted about Count Louis of Male to a group of men and women who had gathered at Beoostenblijde Manor to wait for Count Louis, who would arrive later in the evening of the same day.

In Heyla de Smet's finely decorated hall stood and sat first and foremost Gillis Vresele, now the patriarch of the Pharaïldis group. Also present were John de Smet, Heyla's father, the goldsmith, and Evrard Vresele the monk, Gillis's son. Also Gillis's other son, Boudin, stood close to his father. Next to Boudin stood Pieter Denout, hands on his back, as well as the shipper John de Hert.

These were formidable men, men of wealth and power, the five prominent figures of the Pharaïldis clans, dressed all in expensive wool tunics and in long cloaks lined with ermine. Nobody would have suspected these men to be smiths, fullers, shippers or even merchants. They stood as barons, knights of the county of Flanders, as towers of dignity, and maybe they

were the real aristocracy of the land, for together they were wealthier than the count, in money and in lands owned.

To one side of the table, sat I, Jehan Terhagen, Quintine Denout my love, and Nete de Hert who kept the books of the Pharaïldis possessions. Heyla de Smet, front frowning, sat next to Quintine. Heyla was Louis of Male's lover, the mother of three of his finest children.

We met at Beoostenblijje, Heyla's manor, to not draw too much attention in Ghent, and also because we served as counsellors to the count, outside his court. Louis of Male wanted the meetings, infrequently called together, to remain secret. His court feared the influence of Heyla de Smet, and had his barons known that with Heyla sat some of the wealthiest poorters of Ghent, men who had been friends to the late James van Artevelde, counselling the count, they would have been even more alarmed. The courtiers might have taken rash, violent actions, targeting us.

Heyla was always quick to defend her lover, 'you are too harsh with Louis! He had to ascertain his claims, as Reginald of Guelders did. Furthermore, it was true Louis was still waiting for the dowry of Margaret to be paid. Duke John III was a kind man, but he was reluctant to let go of a dime! Louis has been very patient with that issue in the past, because he respected much John III, his father-in-law. You seem to forget two other realities. First, when Louis was wounded after Crécy, John III accepted Louis in his castle and he cared for him with affection and advice. Ever since, Louis regarded John III as something of a father figure, a father, stepfather, living and close, like Louis's deceased father, Louis de Nevers, had never been a real father to him. Naturally, Louis now considers he has rights on the duchy of his father-in-law and almost adopted father! Louis feels deeply, but nobody asked his opinion about the succession, nobody offered him anything. Everything has been quietly arranged, exclusively within the restricted circles of the emperor's closest family! Brabant is a feudal fief of the German emperor and indeed, Wenceslas, husband of Joanna, is the brother of the emperor. There is not much more to know about this affair of heritage, isn't there? Louis does not have to agree wholeheartedly with this simple state of affairs, this one-sided exertion of pure power.'

Heyla paused and let her arguments sink in.

'Second, there is something you may not have heard of,' she continued, 'but which Louis confided in me. Some of his better water counts told him lately of their concerns. They have perceived subtle changes in the coastal lines of northern Flanders and of Zeeland. They seem to think the bays and the waters, the dunes and the polders are changing the lay of the lands. They told Louis the bays might get silted in, filled up with sand and mud, and become unfit for navigation by the larger ships. The modification of the coast happens very slowly. The changes may reach dramatic, drastic proportions only in a hundred years, but the water counts told Louis the coasts of Zeeland and of northern Flanders, the islands in the mouth of the Scheldt, may get larger and come higher, which would lead to Sluis and Damme becoming closed for cogs. There are no bays on our seaside coast, so Louis has been worrying and looking for other accesses to the sea where boats can hide and feel protected from tempests. His water counts have told him only the Scheldt throws water with enough power into the sea to keep its mouth open and deep for cogs to sail in. You too, Pharaïldis men, have explained to Louis many times how important the control of the Scheldt is for eastern Flanders. You have repeated this so many times he has come to believe you!

Don't you see? Louis has bought Dendermonde, has put a claim on Mechelen, and has sent his fleet to Antwerp. Louis wants control over the Scheldt! His first aim with this war is to

become duke of Brabant, of course, but he realises quite realistically he will not be able to hold onto that claim. Not against the brother of the emperor! He wants to push the issue to receive substantial compensation from the emperor, not with an obscure castellany such as Guelders has received, but with harbours and towns that control the Scheldt. Controlling the Scheldt has become something of an obsession for him, a matter of survival of the county, he told me!

Yes, Pharaïldis men, Louis of Male has turned from a shy, innocent-looking boy into a striving, aspiring, far-thinking adult man, into a far-reaching strategist. He thinks of course of his purse, but he cares also for the future of Flanders. In that, he has much become your product! He is forward-minded! You created much of how he feels about the matters of the county! You cannot call him an idiot and ignorant boy who is merely greedy and vain! Louis has learnt his lessons!

We were amazed by Heyla's passionate defence.

'My, my, daughter, that was quite a forceful plea you delivered! We should have known you would defend your lover so vehemently!' laughed John de Smet, clapping in his hands. 'You are right, of course! We were too rash. We do not underestimate Louis of Male! We should certainly not quarrel about this issue. Still, depending on how Wenceslas reacts, Louis of Male may lead Flanders into a very bloody battle, a devastating campaign, and if the emperor decides to intervene with his phenomenal resources, then Flanders may be invaded and destroyed by the fierce imperial mercenaries. He is playing a very risky game, a gamble that may go either way.'

'Louis feels Wenceslas is a coward,' Heyla spat back at her father. 'The aldermen of the cities of Brabant despise Wenceslas. Brabant is therefore without a true leader, its army is not organised and has no real head. Louis says battles are not won by power of weapons alone, not by numbers of men, but by the powers of the mind. The army of Brabant is a mottle of independently acting groups of militia and of knights, who hate each other. Wenceslas has been whistled back by the aldermen of the cities and by his wife. He is now sulking in a far corner of the duchy. Louis says his own will-power, his drive to win, the determination of his war lords, are much higher, more concentrated and more true than those of his opponents. He believes his men can cut into Brabant like a knife in butter. I pray he is right, and, believe me father and uncles, Louis has a very calculating, cold mind too in such matters, not unlike you! I think he knows very well what he can do, and what not.'

'We hope so, we really do,' Gillis Vresele sighed. 'Well, from what you told us, I think we should better not press Louis too hard on this point. If he knows what he is doing, where this war can lead him into, us shattering his self-confidence, bringing him to doubt his abilities to lead in war, could be catastrophic for his armies. I propose we do not tell him of our own doubts, then. We agree, of course, with his seeking to gain control over the Scheldt up to its mouth! Him getting away with that feat, would already and obviously mean a great victory.'

'We should talk to the count about Ghent,' John de Hert added rapidly. 'The weavers are increasingly deserting our town. The best weavers draw away, out of Ghent, in alarming numbers. The count must at least accept some points of our plan to make of Ghent a better town for weavers yet again, lest the wealth of our town vanishes!'

'The wealth has already vanished,' Gillis Vresele returned. 'We must consider as certain the fact that the weaving industry may become less and less the prime source of wealth of Ghent!'

I, Jehan Terhagen, smiled at these assertions. The Pharaïldis men, I had remarked, lived in the future more than in the present, a perceived evolution was their reality of today. For them, this was the natural way of thinking, for they had to make decisions today on business that could

only bring in profits many years from now. Strangely, Louis of Male must be such a person too, I pondered, thinking far ahead and scheming for what might come more than for what was. This too was a basic feature of the character of these *Gentenaars*, yet more than any other, the Pharaïldis men had made a habit of reflecting on what was to come. Had they taught this mind-set to Louis of Male? Had they taught the same mind-set to me?

Gillis continued, ‘yes, my friends, the first wealth of Ghent may fail on us! We must hold on to other specifics of Ghent. Ghent will always remain the city on the confluence of the Leie and the Scheldt, connected with waterways and canals to the sea, which serve vast territories with goods. That means trade for us. Our waterways reach from Picardy to Zeeland, and that is our final, everlasting strength. We may well not survive from our own crafts, but from our trade, serve as go-betweens to France and the north and east of the continent. Of course we must develop our local crafts, but we must realise cloth alone may not be enough. If, like Louis of Male seems to believe, some waterways of Flanders may close, we must develop others. Our canal to Zeeland, to Terneuzen, may become as vital to us as the Scheldt and the Lieve today. Count Louis of Male may be right after all!’

‘I am right in what?’ bellowed a very lively Count Louis of Male, irrupting into Heyla’s hall. He was dressed in mail armour, a haubergeon only, in riding boots, leather hoses, and he wore a vizored helmet at his side. He was dressed for war, it seemed, and I, Jehan Terhagen, was surprised at how mature, strong and self-assured he looked. He was far from the young boy, from the somewhat shy personality I had known a few years ago.

‘I suppose you mean my war with Brabant?’ Louis snapped with a strong voice. ‘Well, gentlemen, I know I am right, there. I am not at war with Brabant, though, only with Wenceslas of Luxemburg, and maybe with his wife, Joanna. Brabant must be mine, but if the emperor threatens me too much, and with John II of France sitting on his skinny knees, I shall settle for solid gains and effective control over Dendermonde, Mechelen and Antwerp. This information is for your ears only! Antwerp is vital to Flanders, maybe not in the near future, but she will be in the long end. We must have Antwerp! The presence of Flanders in Antwerp must be stabilised and grown. That is why I sent my fleet to capture the harbour and the town. We haven’t done that yet, but it will happen soon. My ships are sailing into the canals of the town. And yes, my war lords are entering Brabant. I need you too, for Ghent is nearest to Brabant. I need bread and ale for my army, salted beef, pork and mutton, peas and beans, carrots, cabbages, butter and cheese, milk, honey, spices, mustard and mulled wine. I need more shields, spears, swords, torches, tents, you name it. I do not trust many of my current purveyors! Half of them are Lombards from the Land of Aalst, but they are sympathetic to the cause of Brabant. So, I want you at my court. You have to organise the supplies to the army, for the logistics are going awry at the moment. You are the only ones I can really trust, who have sufficient cunning and experience to find me food and equipment fast, fodder for our horses, and only you can deliver it where I need it, day after day. You have to take care of my supplies! Your men must advance with my army and retreat with my army, a task as dangerous and as arduous as the hardships of my men-at-arms, or your militia, may suffer. Now, that was a supplication, a demand and an order!’

Louis grinned, threw his helm on the table, and continued, ‘I guess you think I am being greedy and haughty and vain in my claims on Brabant, don’t you? Maybe I am, maybe I am. I am acting, however, in the interest of my Flanders, gentlemen and gentle women!’

Louis placed also his iron gloves down, saddened, and said, ‘a man works for his lineage, for his offspring, my friends, and I have no male heir. For what else would I be working but for Flanders? Life is short, I know, and my war for glory would indeed be vain and cruel. The

land, our county, is eternal, and must be preserved. I am thinking of our people, of their well-being, and it would be nice for the wealth of Flanders to be joined to the wealth of Brabant. I want to control the navigation on that most important, mighty stream that forms the link between south and north, the Scheldt! So this war of succession is necessary. It shall not be the war for my lineage, for I have no legal heir, and I don't think I will yet have one. My wife, Margaret, doesn't like me to come to her bed, and God knows I don't like it either. She is no good in bed. She bears only girls or weakling boys who die within days. Flanders shall most probably go to some lord of the continent, not to the house of Béthune. My heir should have been Heyla's son Robert, the son we gave the most glorious name a Béthune might receive, Robert, but this Robert is not my legal son. He is the son of my love. That must be my punishment for having been so happy, I suppose! Don't think me vain, my friends, pity me!

Louis went to stand next to Heyla, took her hand and smiled to her.

'Heyla is my love, my haven, the woman to whom I always return, gentlemen. She has my heart!'

Louis of Male paused, sighed at so much confession, looked up, and met for the first time the eyes of the Pharaïldis men.

'So,' he shouted suddenly again, 'are you with me or are you against me in this?'

'With you!' the Pharaïldis men nodded and shouted, looking at each other, trying to find out whether everybody gave that cry of rallying honestly or reluctantly. The support for the count was unanimous.

'My ships are at your disposal, lord,' John de Hert told. 'We can bring them, laden with goods, to the inland ports of Brabant. My son Clais will be in charge of the transport. I shall personally lead the *pleiten* and the *duermen* and bring them through hell if necessary. Clais will organise it all from out of his Ghent offices! You can count on us!'

'That is how I like real men to answer,' Male replied, smiling. 'How about the supplies?'

'I can deliver grain, butter, milk, poultry, salt, herrings, other fish such as cod, and also fodder for the horses and peat for the winter fires,' I added quickly. 'My polders are close to the Scheldt, close to Antwerp. My supplies will be the closest to Brabant, and the cheapest, lord! I can also deliver vegetables, food from the Four Crafts!'

'More grain, bread, oats, cakes, meat and mulled wine and ale can come from Ghent,' Gillis helped. 'We have contacts in Brabant for ale. Weapons and other supplies of iron too we can arrange from out of Brabant. When the Brabanders see we pay for what we buy, they will grumble less, feel less inclined to resist. We shall buy local supplies.'

'We can arrange for loans, for temporary funding,' Boudin Vresele nodded.

Count Louis of Male went to the other side of the table, put his hand on Boudin's shoulder, and told, 'my friends, I must confess I expected more adversity from you. I am touched! You understand my purpose! I promise you my campaign shall be swift, victorious, and lead to tangible results! I am not a man of idle words anymore. You support me now, and I shall deliver, my war lords shall deliver. Let's drink to that!'

Heyla called to have her servants bring in wine. Gillis Vresele had sent her a new load of wine by a cog John de Hert had sailed into the bay of Axel. She could serve the excellent wines Gillis had chosen.

While we all stood in Heyla's hall, smiling and clinking our cups to Louis of Male's success, John de Hert said, 'lord count, we too have something to ask of you. You know our plea, it is the same plea we have held at each of our meetings. The basis of the well-being of Ghent lies

in the weaving industry. The weavers are leaving our town steadily. We have written a report about what could be done to keep the weavers in Ghent. Can you help?’

Louis of Male stopped smiling.

‘I expected your question, Ser de Hert, and it is tough for me to grant you what you ask. I have called many weavers out of exile, but the weavers revolted once more, so I had to send some of them back into exile, your former friends of the van Artevelde family among them. I am aware of the issues of the weavers’ guilds in my good towns, in Ghent foremost. Unfortunately, I still perceive the weavers to be in favour of England, which I am too, secretly, but which I cannot openly tolerate or declare, beyond a certain point and at this moment. The weavers are also still living within the mind-set of ten years ago! They are in favour of the cities’ aldermen controlling the county, and I cannot tolerate that. I believe it is counter-productive for Flanders. Flanders needs a strong and unique leader. Mind you, I am for dialogue between the estates and the people of Flanders. I respect the parliament of Flanders, but I cannot and will not hand over military and political power to the weavers as of now. When the weavers change, want to cooperate instead of to dominate, adapt in behaviour, and when I can be convinced they want to seek consensus with me, as I do with them, then I shall listen to what they have to say. Today is not such a moment. It is a constant worry, gentlemen! I realise the wealth of Ghent is not growing because of the conflict between the weavers’ views and my views, which are also of course the views of the lords of the countryside and of the cities, and of most of the other guilds in my towns. When the situation will become very tight, I shall take measures, relax the rules on the weaving craft and diminish or abolish the special taxes. Also, don’t tell me a city like Ghent lives and die with the weaving craft! Nothing is eternal, you know, as history tells us. Everything is in flux, the philosopher learns us. He is right! Prepare and diversify! Learn to live without a weaving industry as the main or even sole income for your town! You can do that! Have you not proven how resourceful and energetic you can be in the past?’

‘We are doing that, lord,’ Gillis Vresele nodded, ‘but many weavers are having a very hard time. They suffer, and therefore leave. We, traders, will survive, find other sources of wealth, but the weavers and the fullers will suffer dire poverty. Poverty engender revolt and violence. That, we wish to avoid.’

‘I know, I know,’ Male sighed, but we all understood little would be done, and too late, to save our major industry.

I, Jehan Terhagen, didn’t really care, for I had other worries, many worries, on my mind, and the weaving industry of Ghent didn’t affect my profits. The population of Ghent had declined only little since I had started managing the lands of the Pharaïldis men, whereas I had begun to expand my export to other countries. My real worries were of an entirely different kind, but I said nothing about my personal issues that evening.

Late in the night, we all left for Old and New Terhagen, leaving the couple of Louis and Heyla alone at Beostenblijje. Early the next morning, the *Gentenaars* returned to our home town. They began to organise the supplies of Louis of Male’s campaign in Brabant. We would reap enormous benefits from managing the logistics of food and other supplies to the army!

## The Terhagen Mystery

At the end of 1352, on a dark October evening, I rode on the road to Hulst. I had travelled by this way from Axel to that town, one of my habitual journeys, and I was happy to have

reached the farms of Absdale, which announced Hulst in the far. I knew the town of Hulst very well. I had been there several times before, on my way to the Scheldt. It was a nice, friendly, peaceful, clean little town, connected to the sea by the mouth of the Scheldt via a waterway and a bay northwards. About ten years ago, a moat had been dug around the centre, and an earth wall had been thrown up in front of that moat, but no high walls protected the inhabitants from armies. Nevertheless, I felt secure among the people of Hulst, of whom I knew many. I would soon ride up to the inn of the ‘Three Kings’, to a good bed and a tasty supper. The host had seen me often, and I always paid the right price in cash without grumbling. I was thus riding past Absdale, alternatively galloping and letting my horse walk at ease, on a stretch of the road at which the path was lined by rows of beeches and shrubs, to small woods on both sides of the road. The weather was still fine, it did not rain and the earthen path was not too muddy. The roads here, of course, were not cobbled as the streets in Ghent and the roads around the city. I didn’t give much attention to the low cottages of Absdale, small farms most of them, for I had seen them often.

Unexpectedly, three other horse riders emerged from a wood near the road and drove their horses in a canter towards me. I had only a little cash money in my purse, enough for a voyage of four days, but my first reaction and instinct was to believe road-bandits headed for me. The men simply rode on to me at a steady pace. They showed no signs of aggression, but I stiffened to guards. My right hand went to my sword. I pushed my horse to the extreme left side of the road, so that I would have some advantage of position to protect me and my horse, by being able to slash out to the right. For a heartbeat I thought the man who led would pass me by without much ado, wish me a good journey and ride on, but when his horse stepped next to me, I noticed his hand reach suddenly for his sword, drawing it very rapidly and swinging it to me in a sudden slice. By that time, however, I too had my sword above me. The steel clank, I urged my horse on, but I bumped into the two other men who rode behind their leader and barred my way. I had to bow deep under another swing of a sword, which was delivered from my right. While I ducked my head, I slashed out to the leg of the man on my left, having my body half out of the saddle and to that side. I thrust, cut and drew my weapon in a long slice into the riding-breeches of the bearded man. His sword did not fall out of his hands, but he groped with his left hand to the leg that turned red. I had cut him deep! My horse darted aside, having been startled by the attack. It neighed in surprise. I drove my spurs into its side, adding to its panicky desire to flee. The animal entered into a gallop. I felt free from the three attackers. My horse was tired, for I had travelled already quite some way, but I gained a few lengths advantage on the bandits. It would take them some time to reach me, and each distance I could get closer to Hulst meant an added opportunity for me. I drove my horse on, looking out in the last light of the day for protection of any kind and for the first houses of Hulst.

I could not reach Hulst and escape from my pursuers. Their horses galloped faster. I looked out for another small wood and rode into it, hoping at the best to separate the two bandits. I deviated to the left. The bandits would have to come and find me. I did not like fighting on horseback, so I jumped out of the saddle once among the trees, had the time to wind the reins around a bush, but not to grasp and arm my crossbow, for I heard the two riders approach to where I stood. I found a long piece of old wood, a thick piece, went forward, away from the horse that was now vital to me, and waited behind a tree, at the end of a glade, for the riders to appear. One of the horses came at me at full speed, which was brave but intrepid for the man on its back. When the animal rode past the tree trunk behind which I hid, I slammed with all my force the piece of wood into its mouth. The animal whinnied in pain. Blood spouted from its mouth. I didn’t think it was seriously injured, but the horse was sufficiently surprised. It

pranced in panic, threw its hooves high and stopped brusquely in its track, throwing its rider over its head into the soft earth of the wood. In one short moment, I jumped on the dazed man, cutting at his throat with my sword. I cut the artery of his life. I left the man gurgling in his blood and I turned immediately, holding my sword vertical, straight, like a crucifix of steel, in the defensive position Ywen had taught me to confront horse riders in battle. The third man, the leader, had surged past me to the other side of the trees, had not seen me attack his companion, but he did stop his horse, startled by the noise, and he headed back. He walked his horse. I remained standing in a position like a crusader, waiting, panting already.

Maybe I impressed the leader, for I had eliminated his two companions in seconds' time. We locked eyes. I saw a wild look of hatred. He had a clean shaven, pale face, hair black but neatly tightened in a knot behind his head. He had the hooked features and long face of the aristocrat. The man was not a mercenary, not a professional warrior, but he knew well how to fight with a sword. His clothes were of fine quality, better cloth than those of his comrades. He gauged me for quite a time, holding his horse at the reins. He hesitated, noticing how well I stood there, as one who had learned to fight with the sword the proper way. My eyes defied him.

'Come on, you bastard,' my eyes told him, 'you are seated on a horse, but my sword can reach you. I am not in the least afraid of you!'

I was scared, of course, for I had never before stood my ground against a horse rider. I would have liked to hold a spear to his face.

The man suddenly screamed, and then did what I had not thought he had the courage to try. He attacked me in a burst of energy! He spurred his horse fast on to me, but he kept quite a distance between his animal and me. He swung entirely to one side, sword in his left hand, hanging half out of the saddle in a very strange equilibrium I would not have been able to imitate. He slashed out at my sword, but let it glide to lower over my steel, and then he managed to draw with the last inches of his blade deep into my upper arm. I was cut! The movement must have been rehearsed, for a grin of satisfaction appeared on his face and I had not seen it arrive that way, had not expected it. I winced in pain. I managed to limit the damage, to hold my sword in my hand despite the pain, and that might have been something he had not expected. My attacker's horse rode on, disappeared behind me, hurrying back to the road. I heard no effort of the bandit to turn his horse. Maybe I had parried his sword cut somewhat better than he had expected. The rider did not press on his small advantage. Having cut me had not elated him. He must have known I would be more careful a second time. He rode on! I could not see him anymore. I waited for a few long moments, sword still raised. I waited and waited, but no new attack came. I heard the sound of the hooves diminish in the far.

I looked at my arm, then. Blood seeped from the wound. I had been cut about three inches long, deep, but only in the flesh. I didn't think muscles or blood vessels had been sliced. I stepped back to my horse, reached in my saddlebags, found strips of cloth, and bound those around my arm, stemming the blood. The cut was only a fifth of an inch or so deep, but the wound stung! I was not sure I could use that arm again at the next attack, and I was definitely right-handed and right-handed alone! I had never learned using my left arm properly. No further attack came, however, so I relaxed and went over to the man who lay on the ground. He had drained his blood, I noticed. He would be dead by now. I searched his pockets, found a purse with a few silver coins, but otherwise no indication of who he might have been or from where he might have come. He was dressed in leather like a guard or a mercenary, this one, not as a lord or knight or even a skilled man-at-arms. He was merely a

highway robber, I thought, a man with straggly brown hair, maybe over thirty years of age. He did not look very intelligent. I was sorry for him and I apologised to the man, closing his eyelids. I had not wanted to kill, but in the heat of the battle, I doubted I should have acted otherwise. His hair was unwashed and uncombed. His face was not too clean.

‘I’m sorry, man,’ I murmured. ‘I would never have killed you, but you tried to send me to the other world. Every man must defend himself!’

Maybe this man was a hired killer. His long, thin dagger, was well used, the wood of the hilt stained from use with oil and maybe old blood. His sword, clothes also, seemed well-used, but in nothing special or rich.

I climbed back on my horse, holding the reins in my left hand. I rode out of the wood, looking to left and right but seeing nobody. I rode in a slow canter to Hulst, watching out for new attacks. I reached Hulst before the gates got closed, and rode at ease to the inn. I asked for lodging. The hosteler remarked the blood at my arm, saw the wound, and called for a barber or a doctor to have a look, clean and treat the cut. He didn’t ask questions, and neither did the doctor. I explained I had been attacked by highway robbers near the city, which stirred up quite a commotion in the hall. The innkeeper not only got me a good doctor, who closed my wound, causing me much pain and grimaces, but also a sergeant of the bailiff, to whom I had to tell where a body laid and where a saddled horse might stray. The sergeant told me he had not heard of bandits in the environs. He promised to ride with a few men in the morning. He believed my story when the hosteler vouched for me, and told him I was who I pretended to be. The name of Terhagen inspired some respect in the people of the inn. I ate and drank, paid the doctor, and I went to bed early, as I usually did, saluting the men who remained in the inn.

In the morning, I woke early too, as I always did, and was not hindered by anybody to pursue my journey. On the road, however, I started thinking. I had rather remained in shock the day before. Was it pure chance the hoodlums had been waiting in ambush, or had they been waiting specifically for me? I supposed the worst case, which was that they had stood on guard until I arrived at that place near the wood. Who then might have told them I would pass there? I had not particularly made a secret of where I would be heading on this trip! Servants in New and Old Terhagen knew I would ride on this road and travel by Hulst. I always took that road. So, if the worst case was they had been waiting for me, why then had I been attacked? I racked my brain, but could not find a good reason. Somebody wanted me killed, but who and why? Of course, the gang of three might just have stood in waiting for any traveller to pass by that evening, but I believed that probability to be very low. I thanked my guards, friends now, Ywen, Everdey and Mathis for having trained me so well and so often for battle, not only in mock duels, but in all sorts of traitorous attacks. Their tricks and experience had served me well. I had a choice, now. I could either return to New Terhagen and have Wivine and Quintine first scold me for having been imprudent, and then push me into bed for days, or I could continue my journey, bite on my teeth to help still the pain in my arm. I sighed, and decided to ride on to the polders of the Scheldt.

Three days later, on my way back, I stopped at the cloister of Ter Hage. I hoped the nuns, the ones who knew a little about medicines and wounds, might have a look at my arm and tend to it. I was always welcome at Ter Hage convent. I also wanted to satisfy a hunch, an idea that had remained in the shadows of a corner of my mind. There were documents of my family, of my real family, at Ter Hage. I thought I should browse through those before I returned to my castle.

Mother Amalberga in person looked at my arm, cleaned the wound and placed an ointment on the red slice, which she said would make the cut heal more quickly and halt infection. She

proved right, for the salve eased the pain. I was very thankful to her. Later, I asked her whether I could have a look at the documents she had preserved for me in the cloister. 'Sooner or later you would come for those documents,' Amalberga told. 'Do you just want to read them or do you want to take them with you? We kept them at your disposal, you know.' I hesitated.

'They have been deposited in the cloister,' I replied after a few moments of reflection. 'I would like them to remain here for the moment, if you don't mind. Maybe I will take some out of the box to take them with me, but most I would like to remain in your keeping.' 'I don't mind,' Amalberga said. 'They are hidden with our own most precious charters and parchments. Your documents are kept together in one chest your father deposited at the cloister. We have other such chests, by the way, from other families, mostly of Axel. I'll give you a room and have the box brought to you. You can read the documents in that room. Take what you want, please, the box is yours and the contents are too. Place what you want back in the chest, and we'll hold the box for you in a corner of our strong room for as long as you want. Has this anything to do with you and Terhagen being attacked?' Mother Amalberga was a very intelligent woman. I replied, 'I don't know, Mother, but I sure would like to know.'

A day later, at dawn, I attended mass in the cloister and then a nun showed me a small room in which stood a table and a chair. A few moments later, two men who worked in the abbey brought me the iron chest. When they left, Mother Amalberga came with two keys, which were necessary to open the elaborate lock on the box. She told me she had finally found what she thought were the keys. The box was not very large, but heavy from the thick iron bars, a box of about fifty inches long by thirty wide and thirty high. Amalberga opened the lid for me, but then she stepped through the door and closed the panels behind her.

I looked into the box. I saw folded parchments and scrolls of parchment, some still sealed with old wax. I sighed and opened the first scroll, began to read. I'm afraid I spent the entire morning going through the documents. Twice I heard a knock on the door, and when I called to enter, a nun brought me a smile and a tankard of ale with a pewter cup. I was quite popular with the nuns of Ter Hage!

To my surprise, some of the texts were written in Latin, even most of them, some of them in French, others in Flemish or in a similar language. The French texts surprised me most. They were all hard to read, many written in very bombastic phrases, in stylised letters, which took me to read painstakingly word for word until I could discern the phrases and the meaning. A few of the parchments were very old. They were birth certificates of my family, wedding certificates, letters from kings and counts lauding the work of my father, other documents of my family.

My uncle, the elder son of the Ter Hage domain, was called Colin, which I remembered. His wife, my aunt, was Marie, which I too remembered well. They had had two children, who had perished in the attack and fire of Old Terhagen. This was asserted in a parchment written by the then Mother Amalberga of the abbey. One of such documents also told what had happened at Old Terhagen, and how my sister and brother had been killed.

My father's name was Leurens. He was the younger son of Terhagen. There were no other children or relatives in the Terhagen family of my grandparents, whose names were inscribed on the birth certificates of my father. I found a parchment scroll indicating the family had originated from the town of Groningen. I found no wedding certificate for my father and mother, but the name of my mother was mentioned in the copy of my birth and baptism certificates, which came both from the convent of Ter Hage. Somewhere in the archives of the convent would be kept the originals of these parchments.

My father's name was written as Ser Leurens van Ter Hage, the proof he had been a knight. The family seemed to have dropped their former name and reverted to the name of the place they lived in. My mother's name was mentioned twice as Marthe de Vitry, born in the town of Vitry. I had no idea where Vitry was, I had never heard of the name. Little was stated in the documents about my father and mother, but I found two old parchments apparently granted and signed by the counts of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, thanking Ser Leurens van Ter Hage for services rendered to the county at the court of the kings of France in Paris. Stipends had been given to Ser van Ter Hage, large sums. I knew my father had served as a representative of counts and even kings, so I saw here a small confirmation of his work and of his reputation. Apparently, he had been appreciated for what he had done, for letters of praise from princes were rare gifts.

My mother's father was mentioned as one Pierre de Vitry on her French birth certificate, her mother's name was Geneviève de Châtillon. My neck hairs went a little up when I read he name of Châtillon, for the Châtillons were still considered some of the worst *Leliaerts* Flanders had ever known. A Châtillon had been governor of Bruges at the start of the century. I noticed these were names of the nobility. In another document, the name of Châlons was given. I had vaguely heard of a Châlons in the Champagne region, but I had never been there. Would Vitry also be a town of the Champagne?

In the box lay also various property deeds, declarations of property, for lands owned and lands bought by my uncle and father. I read those one by one, made a list of them, and discovered with much difficulty they described stretches of lands I knew belonged to Old Terhagen, among which even the piece of land on which I had built my castle. Gillis Vresele had already given me copies of these deeds, documents re-written by the administration of Axel, asked to be copied by Gillis. Had Gillis opened this same box? He would have found the original parchments! I took these documents out one by one, listed them meticulously, but I found none that might indicate as mine polders, fields or pastures I did not already considered mine. Gillis Vresele had given me copies of deeds for lands of which no documents lay in this box, but he had told me he had bought more land with the profits from Old Terhagen while I was growing up.

I found no additional treasure of gold coins in the box, but a few jewels, necklaces and rings were hidden at the bottom under a velvet cloth and lying on velvet. One necklace was a long, heavy golden chain with a pendant at the end consisting of three intertwined roses, three pink roses, nicely worked, and the roses studded with small pink gems. The gems glittered in a ray of light that forced its way through a small window of the cell, and the gold glowed slightly red, a beautiful, warm colour. It was a fine, delicate piece of work, which must have been of great value, a jewel on which hung a label with the name of my mother inscribed on it. It may have been an ancient family piece of hers. I could ask the de Smets whose work this was, and if it was of French origin, as I suspected. Another necklace consisted of a finer chain, but with at the end a heavy golden jewel, a round piece enamelled in blue with the outlines of a castle or of a church engraved in gold. The jewel had the form of a shield, and the enamel had been placed between the lines of gold. I surmised it represented a badge. The gold lines showed a not very high, square, solid building, topped by a triangular or pyramidal roof, a cross on the top, and flanked by two lean, higher towers on either side. I had never seen such a building on my travels in Flanders.

I also found a ring in a corner, a large silver ring, with the same badge, the same drawing, the same dark blue enamel. I took out this ring, put it on my finger, and it fitted! This was no

woman's ring, probably the signet ring of a lord. It must yet have been brought to Ter Hage, like the necklaces, by my mother.

Except for the family name of my mother, I discovered nothing interestingly new in the box. I hesitated for a moment on whether I would take out the necklaces, and give them to Wivine or Quintine, but I decided Wivine and Quintine had already got newer, nicer jewels from me. The twin sisters might not really appreciate these family pieces, so I placed them back in the box. I folded the parchments, rolled the scrolls back up, and closed the lid. I remarked the ring lay still on the table. I took it and put it in my pocket. Then, I went back to Mother Amalberga, asking her to place the box again in her archives.

The abbess Amalberga closed the box while I was present. Amalberga asked me whether I had found anything of interest, the solution to the Terhagen mystery, but I shook my head. 'I found birth certificates and certificates of baptisms, deeds of lands held and acquired, old jewels of so old a facture they would be difficult to be worn with elegance by women of our times, Mother,' I replied. 'I found no mystery, nothing that might explain the attacks on my castle. Keep the box for us, will you, Mother, and please, yes, possibly in a safe place. The box does contain documents which confirm the Terhagen men were knights. I believe the box is safer here than at New Terhagen. Please.'

'Of course,' Amalberga smiled. 'If ever you would want copies of the documents, we can make those for you.'

'That won't be necessary for now, Mother,' I gave rapidly. 'By the way, my mother was a de Vitry lady. Does the name of Vitry mean anything to you?'

'Yes, your mother was a de Vitry, wasn't she?' Amalberga astonished me by saying.

'She was indeed,' I answered. 'I should have sought more about her and about her family, I confess. I suppose I considered me too much a Vresele to be wondering where she came from.'

'Forgiven,' retorted Amalberga without glancing at me. 'Orphans always at one point in their life, but not at the youngest age, want to know more about their blood relatives. I can tell you have come to that age.'

'Maybe I have. What do you know about the name of Vitry?' I insisted.

'Not much,' Amalberga sighed. 'Vitry is a town in the Champagne region, south of Châlons. That much I found out in a book of French maps of regions. Vitry was a market town. The family of de Vitry may have been stewards of the counts of Champagne in parts of the county. They were no lords, no knights originally, but they were later, and they have been for hundreds of years. I don't know whether Vitry still exists, for it was burned down many years ago in a war between the king of France and the count of Champagne. I read a chronicle of abbot Suger of Saint Denis who mentions the sacking of Vitry. That is all I know. Your mother was a noble woman, also noble of heart. Your father may have met her at the court of Paris, or maybe in Rheims, in the Champagne. I think you should be proud of your parents. I heard the names mentioned and honoured by my sisters. My predecessors told me they were nice, decent, pious people, good Christians, as are you, isn't it, Jehan?'

I felt a little ashamed, for I thought of Wivine and Quintine, of the dubious relations Amalberga must have heard of, and also of the fact I did not frequently attend masses in the churches of the villages around Terhagen. I had thought of inviting a priest to New Terhagen, to live with us. We could have used a priest, but how should I have explained to a priest my living with two lovely wives? I thanked Mother Amalberga for the information, assured her more money would soon arrive from the Ghent families I represented, and I prepared to leave. I returned to new Terhagen in a hurry.

‘You are not a bad man, Jehan Terhagen, I wish you good luck!’ rang in my ears, shouted by a waving Mother Amalberga as I rode out of her gate. I smiled then, and knew I would be welcome at Ter Hage again.

At my castle, I had to explain how I got wounded. Wivine and Quintine chided me for the fine jerkin torn to rags on my arm. I spoke only of bandits on the road, though Ywen and Mathis looked insistently at me when they asked whether really only highway robbers had assaulted me. They smelled something fishy in my explanation, so I levelled with them. They were worried. They didn’t say much, were proud of what they had taught me in terms of fighting off bandits, and I remarked the guards never left the gate towers in the following days. The drawbridge remained high too, most of the time. My wound was almost completely healed, so Wivine and Quintine didn’t make much fuss about it, thought their fingers wandered tenderly over the red scars.

\*\*\*\*\*

About ten days later, I had to travel to Ghent with Martin Denout to confer with Gillis and Boudin Vresele about our acquisitions and results. I had promised Boudin to attend a banquet organised by the aldermen. Boudin and I went over the figures of profits and losses with Nete de Hert. Our ventures in trade and lands still brought in decent revenue, our possessions grew steadily. Gillis and the other Pharaïldis patriarchs looked satisfied.

I used some time of leisure in Ghent to take the ring I had found in my family’s box at the convent of Ter Hage to Heinric Vresele. I didn’t very much like Heinric, but I also did not particularly dislike him, though he was not the kind of man I sought to be close friends with. Heinric was a queer one. One never knew really what one had with him, how to talk to him. Tall but thin as a bean stalk, long face, very pale because he seldom walked in the open air in the summertime, Heinric was the sort of man other men avoided and felt uncomfortable with. He was a lonely man. He was so different! His arms and hands were delicate, long, light, almost transparent white, and they moved a lot in strange, exaggerated movements of elegance as normal men could not manage. His head stood straight in his neck, and he shifted rarely one without the other. When he moved his head, his entire body seemed to gesture together with his ample brain. He lost much hair early, when he was still very young, so that now, at around thirty, his skull was almost entirely bald. Heinric looked at you with his piercing, small eyes, as if he wanted to draw a picture of you in his mind, every time he gave you a glance. His glances were stares, really, insisting stares. He seemed nice enough, in fact he went extraordinarily out of his way to make you comfortable with him, in nice and a little haughtily formed phrases with very sought words rarely used by others in normal conversation, which sounded like rehearsed formulas of politeness, even when they were not. He was everybody’s friend, but the men generally avoided him. They thought Heinric too slick, too smart, too elegant. In meetings, I had heard, he always sought consensus, and usually succeeded in putting everybody at ease with one or other solution. In the *Schepenhuys*, however, he was also renowned for extreme outbursts of anger, during which he might kick minor clerks about. I had never seen or heard of Heinric going out with a girl, or even talk flirtingly to one. Heinric made me really ill at ease when I stayed for some time around him. Still, I went to the *Schepenhuys*, the town hall, where he had his office, for he had been appointed as one of the city’s senior clerks. Heinric had access to the archives of Ghent, and so he might find out what the badge meant on the ring I had brought, quite more rapidly than I could have done, I who was exactly the contrary of a bookworm.

Heinric accepted my ring with two long, precious, outstretched fingers, wiped it clean first with a white cloth he kept under his desk, and placed it on the table. Then, he peered at it from very close, without shifting the object, rather moving his head only to left and right, around it. ‘Hmm,’ he mused, still turning around the object, ‘a signet ring, I would say. You see how the castle is engraved in the stone and then formed by gold thread to hold the enamel? Quite intricate work, this is! Yes, enamel it is, Limoges probably, or from the Meuse region. Very nice jewel you have here, Jehan. Where did you get it?’

‘It belonged to my family, probably to the parents of my mother,’ I told, hating having to give Heinric so much information. ‘I would like to know whether it has something to do with my mother’s family, that is. It may be just a ring bought somewhere, a trinket, but if the drawing represents something, I would like to know what.’

‘No trinket, this,’ Heinric gasped, most hurt in his feelings. ‘This is solid gold on a silver ground, most expensive for a trinket! The de Smets will confirm that to you. No, this is definitely a signet ring with the emblem of a lord on it. A strange castle this is, too! It could only represent the front of a fortress, or maybe more specifically the keep. What did you say the family name of your mother was?’

‘I didn’t say,’ I remarked. ‘Her name was de Vitry. It seems there is a place in the county of Champagne by that name.’

‘Never heard of it,’ Heinric grumbled. ‘How do you know this place is in the Champagne?’

‘The abbess of Ter Hage found out about that. She didn’t know anything more, though. Vitry was a village south of Châlons, she said’.

‘Well then, this is quite a mystery, isn’t it, Jehan? Don’t worry! I’ll find out about it soon enough. I’m not going to keep the ring, you know. Give me a few moments, I’ll make a drawing copy of the picture.’

I waited while Heinric took a sheet of paper and began to draw meticulously slow, small line by small line, eyes almost at only as far as an inch from the ring and from the paper. Was Heinric bad-sighted? I didn’t think so, finally. He only wanted to miss not the slightest detail. It took him so long to reproduce the drawing with obvious pleasure, that I began to move my feet and fingers, sighing a few times, but Heinric ignored my impatience totally until he looked up from his sheet with a grin of triumphal satisfaction. He was a stickler for detail, our Heinric!

‘There,’ he exclaimed, ‘I have it! Background deep blue, form of a shield, lines of gold. This may take me a few days, Jehan dear, where can I find you?’

He smiled obsequiously.

‘I’ll be in Ghent for the next five days,’ I replied. ‘I’ll be at the *Kalanderberg* in our father’s house.’

Heinric had moved to a small *steen* in the *Hoogpoort*, nearer to where he worked, and where I knew he lived with a servant and a maid.

‘Oh, yes indeed, I should have guessed you would, of course. Well, I’ll drop by or let you know one way or another when I found something. If it takes me more than five days, because I have much work to do for Ghent, you see, then I’ll let you know at Terhagen. I may even bring a visit there, in person, Jehan.’

‘Fine,’ I nodded, ‘you’re always welcome at New Terhagen, Heinric. Wivine and Quintine will like seeing someone from among our friends of Ghent!’

‘Would they now, Jehan, would they? I heard they are both quite taken in by you, aren’t they? Nice, nice,’ Heinric wondered, and the question sounded sarcastic at the last end to me. His words unsettled me.

‘Sure,’ I whispered. ‘Look, I have to hurry, now. I have an appointment with Boudin.’

‘Yes, I know,’ Heinric admitted. ‘There is the aldermen’s banquet this evening! I organised much of it, you know! I’ll be there too, so I’ll see you at the Vresele table, with father and Evrard.’

‘Oh, yes, fine! Until this evening then, Heinric! A good day to you.’

I said thus amiably goodbye to Heinric, glad to leave, and I went out of the *Schepenhuis* of Ghent, greeting several men I knew well.

In the evening, we all walked to the banquet in a hall of the small guilds. There was music, dancing, much drinking and eating, and the evening was a typical orgy of display of wealth, happiness and good luck as only Ghent could organise. Some of the Ghent families gave me a queer look, so I surmised they might have heard rumours of me living together with two women at the same time. I was beginning to believe it was not such a good idea after all to have returned to Ghent.

Many of the men who came to talk to me complained about the taxes. They were weavers mostly, sounding bitter and disappointed. They praised the times of James van Artevelde. I wanted to shout at them, ‘those times are over, gentlemen, over and done with, definitely, you have killed van Artevelde, so you had better try to live with what you and your fathers have wanted, and adapt to a new world!’

The atmosphere around these men was more morose than ever. They wore depression and inactivity hanging on their ample cloaks.

When I had finished too many cups of wine than I was used to and too many than were good for me, two very well-dressed, formidably good-looking men came to stand as by chance on either side of me. The other men I had been talking too disappeared as by miracle, turned their backs and strolled on. The two men did not speak immediately, but studied me with insistent glances, which made me feel uncomfortable. I looked from right to left.

‘You are a neighbour of ours, aren’t you?’ the man on my left suddenly wondered.

He was a middle-aged man, heavy-set, stocky, extraordinarily well dressed in blue wool and silk linings, a dark blue cloak hanging like a trophy nonchalantly over his wide shoulders, paunch protruding forwards, hands in his leather belt. He looked like an alderman or a city notable to me.

‘I’m sorry,’ I replied, ‘No, I know my neighbours. I live near Axel, in the countryside.’

‘Yes, you are the lord of Terhagen,’ the person I was speaking to emphasised. ‘We do are neighbours, though not of Terhagen. You own a lot of lands on this side of the Scheldt, above Dendermonde and Rupelmonde, don’t you?’

‘I do manage some of those polders,’ I replied prudently.

‘You do a lot more than merely manage,’ the other man intervened.

This one stood taller, was darker of face, looking like a clerk. He too was extremely well dressed. I surmised the two were poorter-landowners of Ghent, though I didn’t recall who they were.

‘We own land in that region too,’ the first man said, making me turn from the one to the other, which annoyed me and which I found impolite, humiliating and inconvenient. I began to loathe their way of doing.

I stepped instinctively back, so that I could look at them both at the same time. Like me they wore long daggers on their belt, daggers I saw dangling when their cloaks opened, no swords. Maybe they were no knights, after all. I remained looking quizzically at the two men, but I knew instinctively I would have to expect no niceties from these men. I wondered what would come next.

‘We should introduce,’ said the one on my right.

‘My name is Walter de Mey,’ said the one on the left, ‘and this my partner, Walter van Merlaer.’

‘Walter and Walter, good evening, nice to have made your acquaintance,’ I said at a lighter tone, somewhat mockingly.

They had become familiar to me by giving me their names, no less threatening. They again closed in on me. The de Meys had been silversmiths originally, then money-changers and traders. The van Merlaers were landowner-poorters who lived outside Ghent, a family from the old lineages, related to the finest names of Ghent, to the Panneberchs, the van Parijs and the Rijnvisches, the Borluuts. All these were not friends of ours. I would esteem they were our toughest competitors, opponents and outright enemies, enemies also of the van Arteveldes, so I stiffened visibly.

‘We didn’t want to startle you,’ van Merlaer continued, ‘but we cannot say we appreciate what you are doing in our territory, so we would like to have a word with you.’

‘Indeed we would,’ added de Mey on the other side. ‘You kept us from acquiring some of the best lands we had set our minds on. That was not very friendly, not very neighbourly-like.’

‘We also don’t like your inundating polders that belong to us by your inconsiderate construction of earthen dikes. Dikes should be consolidated by stones, and you should watch out when you build a dike where previously none existed.’

‘You are using funds provided to you by the de Hert, the Vresele and the Denout families, aren’t you? You alone cannot have such deep pockets! You are married to a Denout and you shack up with another Denout. The church may not like your living that way. Living openly in adultery is a sin and a public shame. We think you may be a heretic! Heretics are either hung or burnt at the stake!’ Van Merlaer went on.

‘Well,’ de Mey told on the opposite side, ‘we would like in a friendly kind of way, as gentlemen among gentlemen, not sail in each other’s fairway. Go and play in your own sandbox, young man, play far away from the west banks of the Scheldt, north of Dendermonde, and also - now we are at it - far from the eastern banks of the stream, and we can be friendly neighbours again, can’t we? You see, we are gentlemen, but we can stop being gentlemen!’

There was nothing in the world I hated more than being told to mind my own business, to hear someone else tell me what I had to do and not to do, and to stay away from something I liked passionately. Maybe that was because I had not really had a father in my youth, though Gillis had done his best to replace my real father. I was irked by the attitude of these men. I was also not to be vilified by these scavengers. I wanted the names of Wivine and Quintine Denout not to be dragged into the dirt by these uppity fools, these sycophants and scandal-mongers. I was no philanderer. My anger soared, but I held an innocent face. I got the picture of the two Walters. I pushed the argument a little further into dangerous lanes.

‘And when you stop being gentlemen,’ I sneered at the two men, who had come to stand so close to me by then their shoulders exerted some pressure on my body.

They were powerful men, no doubt. I stepped back once more, hating their pressure, croaking, ‘and when you stop being gentlemen, Walter and Walter, you might hire mercenaries and bandits to attack my castle of Terhagen by, or you might ambush me on lonely roads, is that what you do, you honourable poorters of Ghent? My friend, Count Louis, will hear of that with great pleasure!’

My words did surprise them a little, but I saw clearly in their eyes they were not astonished enough to be innocent or ignorant of what I referred to. It was they who had organised the attacks. I instantly knew my enemies. They showed only surprise in learning I had realised they had been the instigators behind the attacks. They stared deprecatingly at me, as if I had done them wrong.

I pushed the advantage, considering them now very crass men, hissing with very angry eyes, because I was thinking of the child Wivine had lost, ‘my castle is impregnable, gentlemen. Your hired killers suffered several deaths when you tried to touch me or my castle. The game can be played by both sides, gentlemen. When you attack my domains again, you shall suffer much more than until now. I now know who you are! I know now, where I have to go. Touch one of my people, one of my beloved, and I shall destroy your families one by one, hurt you where you can be hurt most. I am a lonely hunter, but I hurt unseen, and when the gamers do not expect me. I can be deadly too. You will not only make an enemy out of me, but also out of many other people in Ghent, and they together will take terrible revenge on your families, bite into you as mad dogs do into running deer or hiding foxes. Do not think one second I’m afraid to lock horns with you two!’

‘My, my, we are becoming so aggressive, young boy! Ah, such is the fervour of youth! We don’t know what you are talking about. Attacking castles? Phh! We don’t do things like that, boy! That would be crude, dirty work! No, no, no, we are just having a friendly chat with you,’ van Merlaer shook his head in disbelief. ‘We work much more subtly than you think, boy. We did hear of assaults on your new castle, but we had nothing to do with that, nothing at all! That was a reprehensible, illegal act, far below our standing, shockingly rude!’

‘Still, we can bite too,’ de Mey continued in the same tone. ‘Let’s remain polite, let’s stay civil, boy, no need to get rude. Getting rude is showing bad manners, too. Don’t look for trouble and you will get none. You know what we want. When we want a land, we’ll let you know, and we expect you to back off. A war on the western side of the Scheldt would be detrimental to us all. Aren’t we all poorters of the good city of Ghent? Heed our warning, young Terhagen, and live well! Why, we could even work together! Why not?’

Both men took their tankards of ale from the table at the same time and drank, looking at me from behind their cups.

‘I work alone,’ I said in a boorish mood, and stepped to the centre of the hall, greeting amiably the members of other great families of Ghent, leaving the Walters to follow me with their eyes. I returned slowly to the Vresele table.

For the rest of the evening, I remained sitting at the Vresele table, but an hour or so later I stood up from my chair and went for a walk to say hello to other people in the hall. When I reached the leftmost corner, I saw the two Walters sitting at a small table with a third man, a man dressed in brown leather from top to toe. I thought I recognised in him the leader of the bandits of Absdale, who had assaulted me on the road to Hulst. The corner was dark, however, the candle on the table blown out. In a heartbeat I intended to throw myself on that man and kill him, but I had only a dagger, the guards had swords and spears. I could not start a row in the guildhall. I would immediately be thrown in one of the town’s prisons by the guards of the bailiff. I went back to the Vresele table. I noticed Heinric Vresele at the end, who had come to sit at the other side.

‘Heinric,’ I touched him at the shoulders, ‘don’t be startled, don’t look straight at it immediately, but in the leftmost corner of the hall, two men you undoubtedly know, Walter de Mey and Walter van Merlaer, are talking with a man dressed entirely in brown leather. Please walk by and tell me whether you know who the man in leather is, or ask friends of yours whether they know him.’

Heinric looked quizzically at me.

‘Well, well, Jehan, that sounds like mysterious spy business! Is it that serious? Why don’t I go over to these men, for I know de Mey and van Merlaer, and simply ask who their friend is?’

‘No, Heinric, no! These men are dangerous, enemies of ours! Stay away from them! They are in the mood of killing you at the least occasion. They already tried twice to murder me. They sent bandits on me, probably because I bought polders from under their noses, lands they coveted. The man in leather may be a mercenary, a hired killer. I’d like to know who he is, where he lives, but please try to get his name as inconspicuously as possible, otherwise you too might be in danger.’

‘Right, right. You scare me, Jehan, but I’ll do as you ask from me, dear!’

‘Good, thank you,’ I whispered.

Heinric Vresele stood from the table, strolled to other tables, a cup of mulled wine in his hand. I saw him looking furtively at the three men, who were still discussing in the far corner. Heinric had noticed where the men I had indicated to him sat, and I saw him whisper to other men, who looked stealthily at the same corner.

I could not speak again that evening to Heinric, for by that time the banquet was breaking up. Many people left rapidly, and Gillis Vresele asked me to come home with him to a Pharaïldis meeting in our house of the *Kalanderberg*.

The next day in the afternoon, I strolled through the noisy, lively streets of Ghent to the *Schepenhuis*, anxious to hear whether Heinric Vresele had learned something about the man dressed in leather.

‘Oh happy chance, oh unexpected coincidences, oh strangest of fates’ Heinric Vresele mused in a low voice, almost whispering. ‘I have some astounding information for you, dear. You won’t believe me, for after you mentioned your mother was a de Vitry, my mouth fell open when I heard the name again! You will be surprised to hear the nice looking, lean man in leather was called de Vitry too! His name is Raymond de Vitry! Can you imagine my surprise? He seems to be in Ghent, as he has been often in the past, to buy goods and to urge traders to come to the fairs of the good county of Champagne. That is not so unusual, Jehan! You may know the fairs of Champagne, as equally our own fairs in Ghent and particularly our fair of Laetare, are famous in France and in the Low Countries. There is nothing extraordinary in him talking to members of the de Mey and van Merlaer families, traders all, about the Champagne fairs.’

I was utterly surprised, indeed, but I doubted the three had only been talking about the fairs of Champagne. I had only heard of the Vitry name very recently. Now, the name popped up from unexpected directions.

‘Are you sure?’ I whispered back, not wishing anybody in the *Schepenhuis* to hear what we were talking about.

‘And there is more!’ Heinric leaned to me and whispered in the same very low voice. ‘That Raymond de Vitry deals with the de Mey and the van Merlaer families, since many years, in trading with the Champagne. The Lombards know him quite well too. Moreover, he seems to live in the city of Provins. I thought that information was not to be trusted really, but it makes sense!’

‘Why is that?’ I asked, my curiosity peaking.

‘Well, you won’t believe this either, but I was looking for that badge on your mysterious ring. I found out about that badge this morning! I checked in a book on the badges of the Champagne county. You mentioned Vitry, so I thought that kind of book was good place to start with. Well, your ring holds the emblem of the family of de Vitry!’

I was once more astonished.

‘Now comes the best,’ Heinric whispered lower. ‘Do you want to know what is represented on that ring of yours?’

‘Of course, Heinric, come up with it!’

‘It was easy to find, actually, Jehan, for what you have on your ring is the badge of the city of Provins! No less!’

My mouth too feel open.

‘The picture represents the so-called Caesar Tower,’ Heinric went on. ‘The Caesar Tower is not a church, not a castle, though it could be called a keep. It is a tower of the fortifications of the city of Provins! The tower must be a structure well known in the region. Provins is one of the major fairs of Champagne, Jehan! It owes its formidable fame because it is situated about halfway between Paris and the Champagne, so many traders from Paris go there and buy or sell goods. I can give you the name of a dependable merchant of Ghent who has been to Provins. He has heard of the de Vitry family, but didn’t know anything interesting about them.’

I leaned back in my chair in front of Heinric. What the clerk of Ghent, my stepbrother, told me took time to be absorbed. I must have stared dull-witted at Heinric with a mixture of passion, hatred and eagerness, for he became uneasy about my attitude. He began fumbling his fingers, avoided my eyes.

‘Have you learned anything more?’ I asked.

‘No, that was all! I thought it answered all your questions. Should there be more?’

‘No, no, probably not, Heinric. You were of great help! I won’t forget what you did. I owe you! Thank you! At least now, I know who is stalking on me. It gives a better feeling to know one’s enemies.’

‘I didn’t do much,’ Heinric replied. ‘Glad to have been of help to family, Jehan. Take care. The de Meys and the van Merlaers are no friends of us! With the Bettes, van Parijs, Borluuts, Rijnvisch, Soyssones, Sleepstafs and a host of others, they were opponents of van Artevelde and the Pharaïldis men. The de Meys and the van Merlaers are violent men, capable of anything in a dark alley or on a bridge. They won’t dirty their own hands, though! You may feel a dagger in your ribs on a bridge, and the next moment, you may be thrown off the bridge into the Leie or the Scheldt, without being able to breathe. Take care!’

‘I will, Heinric, thank you. Forget all you told me, but you too watch out for these men. Let me handle this, now.’

Heinric nodded, and I saw he was scared. I left the *Schepenhuis*. Around noon, I returned to Terhagen, but not before having told my entire story to the Pharaïldis men.

## Provins

At dawn of a Monday several weeks later, I woke at the sound of our alarm bell. I had slept with Quintine that night, and I saw her still buried under the many covers, for it was late autumn and the first, humid cold had bitten into New Terhagen. We had not yet fired the hearths of the castle, but would have to start warming up the walls soon. I needed more than a few heartbeats to realise a chiming bell had drawn me cruelly out of my sleep, and then my awareness that a bell sounding meant alarm and alarm danger and that I had to move and run to the walls of the castle, false alarm or not. I pulled on my underwear, threw a mail haubergeon over my head, a tunic and pulled leather hoses on my legs, and boots on my feet. I grabbed my belt and sword, and hurried out of the room, very angry for having been disturbed. I gave no answer to Quintine, who was looking at me with weary, half-open eyes and asked what was happening.

‘Alarm,’ I cried, ‘wake up everybody, bring the children to the room near the tunnel’.

I ran out of the door, down the corridor and the staircase, opened the door of the manor, slammed the panels behind me, and ran through the courtyard. Ywen, Everdey and Mathis ran to the walls at the same time. Everdey's wife was drawing at the rope of the bell near our gates like a madwoman. As always at night, our herse was still down, the front gates were closed and the drawbridge was up, so I thought we were quite safe, but I wondered why Marie was in such a panic.

I shouted to Ywen, 'what is happening?'

'Dunno,' Ywen cried back, 'but when Marie sounds the alarm, alarm it is!'

We ran together up the stairs leading to the walls, when we saw men at the top of one of the towers of the gatehouse.

Everdey cried, 'we are under attack! Men on the roof of the tower!'

Everdey was one who had been less surprised. He had also grabbed the best weapon to us in an attack, for he was cranking a crossbow and he wore a sack of bolts on his back. Crossbows were the best weapons to ward off an assault.

Mathis and I ran to the tower on which we thought we had seen figures against the skyline. Other women emerged in the courtyard, then, carrying lighter crossbows. Anna, Mathis's wife, also carried a goedendag. She was a strong woman, Anna! How she could run with a crossbow in her hands and a goedendag under her armpit remained a mystery to me, but that was what she managed to do. Marie stopped sounding the bell. She grabbed a crossbow. The women did not hesitate. They ran to the walls. I shouted a warning men might have reached the walls too, but the women ran on. At the same time, children began to run over the courtyard to the manor. They knew the rallying point for the children was at a room in the manor, with Lady Wivine. I cursed again, for Ruebin, Kerstiaen, Arent and Lieve did not run to the manor at all, but straight to the walls, following their mothers. They too wore crossbows. These young boys of our guards were barely ten years old, but they had learned how to crank and release a light crossbow, and now they did not hesitate, wanting to protect their family. I had not wanted this, I did not want children to be exposed and maybe hurt by enemy crossbow bolts, but I had no time to push them back.

Mathis shook me by the shoulders and held me behind him. He too had now a crossbow in his hands, crossbows we left near the entry to the gate's towers. It was a better idea for him to ascend the stairs first with that crossbow armed. We ran up the stairs. All this happened in a few moments' time!

No attackers had yet climbed down the stairs of the front tower. That door was usually bolted from the interior of the yard, too, so the men would not have been able to erupt into the courtyard. Mathis ran in front of me. Suddenly, I heard the twang of the bow being released and then Mathis dropped the crossbow beside me, drew his sword, shouted like a madman, and we emerged in the highest room of the tower, where two men waited for us, also with drawn swords. An inert body was lying on the floor.

In the round space, high above the moat, we fought. Mathis and I each took on an opponent. We lunged and slashed with our swords. Mathis needed only two thrusts to wound his adversary, while I had a hard time with the man who stood before me. The man had then two swordfighters to face, so we wounded him rapidly and badly, and Mathis did not hesitate to push his weapon deep in the man's belly. A third man came down the few stairs from the tower's platform. He found two opponents waiting for him. We hacked savagely with our swords at him. We had to be quick, for more men might have climbed onto the tower. The new attacker had barely placed a foot in the room when he tried to slash out in round movements, when we sent him too to meet his Creator. We fought with fury, with wild and unyielding

energy. We realised what was at stake: the lives of our women and children. Mathis and I let three men lying in the round room dying in a widening pool of blood. The fourth man was spread half way down the stairs.

We hurried up the last few stone stairs and felt the very cold wind lash at our faces. On the platform, we met yet another man, who was trying to step over the battlements of the platform, but hadn't reached it yet. We hacked pitilessly at that man too. He held in desperation to the stones of the platform. He wobbled there, for the ladder placed against the tower was a rickety one, which moved with the man's consternation at seeing us run to him, swords above our heads, ready to cleave his skull. He stood with one foot on the uppermost rung of the ladder, one hesitating foot on the platform. A crossbow bolt hissed past our ears, but we managed to parry the man's feeble sword. We barrelled into him. He careened over the embattlements. We destabilised him and thrust our swords into his body, so that he brought his hands to his chest, lost balance, and fell backwards into the void, screaming loudly. The screams of the man were horrible to hear, but we had not time for pity.

We looked cautiously over the embattlements of the tower, to notice the slim ladder entirely, placed against the tower of the gatehouse, three men trying to climb up. The men who stood on the lower rungs had not much courage to continue climbing when they saw our heads over them, so they jumped from the ladder. They were smarter than their companion higher up, who had hesitated. That man gasped for a moment, but then he placed his two feet along the long beams of the ladder, and slid down. He reached the ground at great speed and probably with burnt hands, but he stood on the beams below, where he bumped into another man who had just gone down. Both the men fell into the water of the moat. Crossbow bolts spat from high on the walls down on the attackers. The defence of the castle was now in full effect.

Mathis and I shook the ladder with our hands, swung it to and fro, until it moved enough to slide from the walls and fall. Two men held the ladder below, but one of these got hit by an arrow shot by one of the women on the walls, or by Everdey or Ywen. The man fell in the moat, while the two other men swung their arms desperately, trying to reach the border of the moat. They would have a hard time climbing up from the moat, for the water was deep and the side of the moat steep and slippery. It was easier, then, to draw the ladder totally oblique, and when the ladder fell, we heard the sound of it crashing its wood, rungs and beams, partly on the stone bridge in front of our gate, partly in the water between the stone bridge and our walls. We looked for other ladders against our walls, but saw none.

It was hard to place a ladder against the walls of my castle! I would never have thought such a feat possible. Our attackers had been more clever! They had first pushed long, large wooden beams from the end of our bridge to the stones that formed a ridge under the drawbridge. On these beams they had placed the ladder on two planks thrown square over the beams. One needed some dexterity to walk over the beams and then to climb the ladder that should not shift much or it tumbled down, and the manoeuvre had been executed in silence and in almost darkness, but that is what the bandits had accomplished. I wondered how many times they had been spying on our castle before having found this means of getting in. Their plan had drawbacks, however. The ladder was so high it had been wobbling above, and only a few men could get to the top of the squat gate towers. They had obviously hoped to surprise us, and a few men could indeed have lowered the drawbridge, drawn up the herse and opened the gates from the inside, while defending the gate against us. It had been a good plan, but thanks to God and Marie, it had failed! They must have been delayed too, or placing the beams and the ladder had been a more arduous job than they thought, for it was already light when Marie sounded the alarm. Their aim had been to surprise us at the very first light of dawn, and kill us

in our sleep. It had been a treacherous, cowardly, but very dangerous plan, dangerous for us, very risky for them.

I looked down the tower. More than twenty men were still standing deep below, some on the bridge, some along our moat. They were drawing the two swimmers and then the third man out of the water, using ropes. Without a ladder, these men would never get into the castle! Their attack was now vowed to disaster, even if they might not know it yet. They tried another tactic.

Five crossbowmen knelt in the grass near the moat. Other men held large wooden shields, pavises, in front of the archers. The crossbowmen started shooting at the castle's embattlements. They formed a great danger for our women and for the children on the walls. I made a mental note something had to be done to refrain ladders from being placed a second time against our towers using the ledge beneath, and I looked at Mathis.

'We must do something about those crossbowmen,' Mathis yelled to me, hiding between the stones.

Crossbow bolts swept above our heads and we heard other bolts thump against the stones of the battlements.

'We cannot, unless we sally,' I replied, 'and those bandits are just waiting for us to do that. They may be ensconced behind the hilltop, or in the wood. We are not nearly as numerous enough as they. We'll have to sit this out, like the last time. They will run out of bolts! We must go to the walls now, tell the women to hide better, and use our crossbows too.'

Mathis dared to show his face, looked, ducked again, and nodded to me. The ladder had crashed into several pieces, he told me, was of no use anymore to the bandits, and he had seen no other ladders near.

We ran down the stairs, grabbed each a crossbow, and climbed up the stairs to the walls. Mathis ran left, I to the right. When I arrived at the top of the walls, I stood near Quintine, dressed as a man, wearing high leather boots, and releasing a bolt from her crossbow. She released one arrow after the other. Her arrows, I saw, slammed into the pavises. I shouted, 'forget about the crossbowmen! Try to hurt the men on the bridge and along the moat.'

Quintine nodded, and I ran on. A little further stood two boys, Arent and Lieven, Everdey's boys. I ordered them to hide, to stop shooting for a while, for they too released bolts downwards, aimed at the enemy crossbowmen, and I reached Marie and Everdey. They sat next to each other and they were the last on this part of the wall. The others stood on the left side of the towers. I crouched next to Everdey, who was cranking his crossbow once more. Everdey grinned, saying, 'if we and they keep this on, we will soon run out of bolts and arrows, but those guys won't get into our castle!'

'Yes,' I nodded. 'The real danger are those crossbow archers, for the moment. In the next hours, nobody shall climb our walls, and we have enough other weapons to ward them off.'

'We must shoot together,' Everdey said. 'You shoot down into a pavise, as close to the border as possible. When the man holding the pavise thinks he can withdraw the shield for his companion to shoot, right at that moment I can aim at the archer.'

I nodded once more.

'We begin with the first archer on the right,' I told.

We both crouched behind an embattlement, Marie gave me her cranked weapon. I made a sign with my head I was ready, and I aimed at the rightmost man holding a pavise. I slammed a bolt into the wood. I saw the pavise be pushed a little sideways, and then the pavise moved.

The archer stood unprotected just for the time he need to aim his crossbow at me, but an arrow released by Everdey pierced his chest. The man wore only leather, no iron breastplate, so he fell backwards by the impact of the hit, the arrow protruding from his chest. He would not crank a crossbow again. The man who had been holding the pavise looked in astonishment at his dead mate, and then he dropped the pavise and ran for the wood behind him. I saw the men-at-arms shouting in disgust at him.

I put up one finger up at Everdey and grinned, ‘one down! Number two, from the right!’ We took on the next man. With him we had to try the stratagem two times, but again Everdey’s skill with the crossbow was stupendous. Two fingers came up! Only three crossbowmen remained near the moat, and we saw these shouting at each other. Somebody on the walls was a better marksman than they! I supposed they realised the attack would be too expensive for them. Also from the other side of the walls, bolts concentrated on them. One pavise looked like a porcupine, arrow and bolts sticking out from the wood. I let Arent and Lieve too shoot a few bolts at them. After a few moments more, one enemy archer fell, and he two others retreated, holding the pavise to their backs. I heard much cheering from the other side of the walls.

Everdey and I then concentrated on the men on foot and on the few men who rode horses. These last men simply stood there, horses nervous, but idle, for they could not enter the castle. Their plan had been to take the castle by stealth, using the ladder, but that had failed thanks to the vigilance of Marie. With the enemy crossbowmen retreating, we had the advantage of a dozen crossbow behind the embattlements, taking targets and shooting down. I noticed how from the left walls, arrows concentrated on one or a few men, and so many bolts and arrows being aimed at one man must have been an unnerving experience also the others might not cherish. Mathis was at work with that idea, I thought. Nevertheless, bolts still soared above our heads, for the enemy crossbowmen shot while retreating. They shot from the far, and not nearly as fast as we did. From the walls, nobody took target on the crossbowmen anymore. Everybody shot at the men-at-arms who had evacuated the bridge and ran along the moat.

I saw five men on horseback standing some way off, looking at the spectacle of their footmen running aimlessly around the impregnable fortress of New Terhagen. What would they think off next?

I crept to closer Everdey, saying, ‘five horse riders are standing to the right, near the wood. One of them is dressed in leather entirely, wearing a long helmet and a breastplate that shines silvery. Do you see that man?’

Everdey was panting from cranking his crossbow. He stopped with that, looked down, and nodded.

‘I want that particular man hurt badly,’ I said. ‘He is the leader! You are a much better archer than I. Can you hit him before he notices we are taking aim at him?’

Everdey nodded swiftly in hope. He crouched and aimed his crossbow. I did so too, but I waited for Everdey. Everdey placed the arrow on his bow, and then he let the wood of his bow rest on the stones of the embattlement. He took aim carefully, and very slowly held the chord. Everdey had taught me how to calculate for distance, humidity of air, and strength of wind, but I never quite succeeded in hitting far targets as well as he did. I waited for what seemed to me an eternity, but which could not have been more than a few seconds. Everdey shot.

I saw Raymond de Vitry be thrown backwards in the saddle, hit in the breast by the bolt, which pierced his breastplate. He was hit a little to the right side. I released my bolt on his horse, and also the animal was hit, whinnied pitifully, pranced, threw off its rider, and

galloped to the wood, where it fell. Everdey already sent another arrow into the pack of the horse riders, and I followed his example.

When the attackers saw their leader hit, lying on the ground, the horse riders spurred their horses to the wood, and a little later the men on foot also ran, fleeing away from the castle. Had Raymond de Vitry been killed? Loud cheering came from the walls on the other side. Arent and Lieve shouted, too. I had to tell them to duck to safety. Everdey and I grinned hysterically. I showed him my three remaining bolts, and laughed. Everdey beat me: he showed in his open hand only two arrows. A few moments longer, and all we could have done would have been to throw stones at the attackers! The boys, Marie and Quintine, had stopped shooting too. They had not one single bolt left. Now, we dared to stand up behind the embattlements and we cried out our easy victory, and our joy, hands in the air.

I went over to Marie, asked her how she had seen we were being attacked. She said in quite simple words, ‘it was our washing day today. I woke early to start a fire under the tubs. We had decided to wash in warm water this time, which we do once a month. I went to the bathhouse on the other side of the yard, heard a noise, went to the walls. It was still dark then, but the bandits were already at work! Their ladder was up. They tried to surprise us in the dark. I tell you, Ser Jehan, I was so scared when I saw what they were doing, my knees crumbled under me. I ran down, fell almost down the stairs, and I rang the bell!’

I had no words.

‘Marie,’ I started, stopped, put my two arms around her in a bear hug and gave her a tremendous peck on the cheek, which made Everdey burst out with laughter when he saw Marie’s perplexed, red blushing face.

I said, ‘Marie, thank you so much for having saved our life!’

I meant what I said, and she saw how wrought with emotion I was.

We went down our walls, back into the courtyard. We left the children on the tops of the walls to guard, but told them to hide against the crenellations. They were proud we found them worthy of such responsibility, and they would be vigilant.

I had to ride out of the castle. I had to find out how Raymond de Vitry was. The man was still lying on the ground, near the castle, but also dangerously close to the wood. Men could dash out of that wood and attack me. If the attackers still laid in waiting for us, hidden from sight in that dark wood, riding out could be deadly. I hoped the bandits had fled from Terhagen and would not ambush us, but going out remained a risk. Five of the bandits had remained dead or deadly wounded in front of the castle, two more were lying on the bridge, and we had wounded or killed four of them inside the tower of Terhagen. Even if they had been with twenty or thirty men, so many casualties must have sufficed to push them on the run, back to where they came from, but we couldn’t be sure of that.

Finally, Ywen, Everdey and Mathis, Quintine and I, armed with a crossbow each and swords on our belt, opened the gates, took up the horse, let the drawbridge down, and we rode out. Past the bridge we rode in one row. We took our time. We held our horses near the dead men or near the dying ones. One man was still alive, very much in shock and extremely afraid of what we would do to him, as our horses’ hooves stepped very near around him. We let him live, however. We would tend to his wound, a crossbow bolt deep in his shoulder, and hope to learn something from him about the attackers. We left him where he lay for a moment, and we rode cautiously on to where Raymond de Vitry was. His horse lay a little further to the wood, a bolt of mine in his lung. Everdey ended the animal’s misery with a bolt in its head.

Ywen, Everdey and Mathis stepped down, crouched behind the dead horse, crossbows ready and directed at the wood. Quintine and I went up to de Vitry.

Raymond de Vitry lived. He would soon die, though. Everdey had shot a long, ugly arrow that had pierced his armour and his chest. De Vitry was slowly choking to death, gasping for air, blood dripping from his mouth. He must have realised he would die soon. He whispered something, so I went to very near his face, Quintine holding her crossbow ready to finish Everdey's work.

Raymond de Vitry whispered in French he wanted a priest to confess his sins. I told him no priest was near, but giving his sins to God and ask for forgiveness would help him. He looked at me, resignation in his eyes, and said with a croaking voice, 'one of us had to die, cousin. Fate has decided it should be me. Fate has not been kind with me. I don't hate you. God forgive me. You are the lucky one and I am doomed. So be it. Go to Provins, find Pierre de Vitry and tell him who you are. You'll understand.'

'What do you mean?' I asked, 'what should I do in Provins? Why have you attacked us? Will your men return?'

De Vitry made a feeble gesture with one hand of no, no, but he refused or could not say more. He repeated, 'go to Provins, to Provins.'

He had only few moments to live. He tried to get up, to put his back straight, but he turned sideways, coughed up blood, and then his body went limp again, he sagged down, and he did not move anymore. His eyes broke. I felt at his neck, at his artery there, felt a weakening pulse, and then no pulse at all anymore. He stiffened. I closed his eyes. I stood up, next to Quintine. We looked at the woods. All was quiet. I didn't think we would be attacked again.

We rode back to the man who was wounded, near to the moat. We remained on our guard, for even a wounded animal could still sting dangerously. I knelt beside him.

'Here is the deal, man,' I began. 'You are wounded. We can hurt you much more and then kill you, or we can have a look at your wound and heal you and send you back on your way. We can save you or kill you. You choose. I'm only willing to let your live if you answer my questions truthfully.'

The man nodded despondently.

I said, 'who are you?'

'My name is of no importance. Call me Ghijs,' he answered and coughed.

'Fine, Ghijs, where are you from?'

'Kortrijk,' he replied, 'from a village near Kortrijk, but I haven't stayed there since a very long time.'

'Are you a mercenary, a robber, or are you a man-at-arms of a lord?'

'Mercenary! I sell my services to the highest bidder. I am a good warrior.'

'Who hired you?'

'That man there,' he pointed to the corpse behind the dead horse. 'De Vitry hired us and paid us.'

'Why did you attack my castle?'

'De Vitry told us to do that. He said it was important you died. We would have been paid well. You only were our target.'

'Yes, but you would have killed everybody else in the castle, raped the women and killed the children, and you would have pillaged the manor, and then burnt down the castle. You are an evil man, Ghijs!'

Ghijs didn't reply on my accusation.

'Since how long do you work for de Vitry?'

‘Since a few months. We studied the castle, spied on it. We thought we had found an easy way in. We thought we could surprise you. Then that damned bell began to ring.’

‘De Vitry is dead. Who will lead you now?’

‘Nobody! De Vitry is the one who pays.’

‘What will the other mercenaries do now?’

‘They will disperse, leave, disappear, seek other masters. No more money will come their way, now.’

‘Have you seen other men conferring with de Vitry?’

‘Yes. God help me. Draw out the arrow, burn the wound. Otherwise I’ll die!’

‘Tel me quick then,’ I insisted.

‘Yes, there were other men, poorters from Ghent, well dressed, especially one tall, lean man, who often came to talk to de Vitry. He also came with information from Ghent, but I don’t know anything more about all that. I don’t know what was said between him and de Vitry. I didn’t hear his name.’

I surmised the poorter’s name was Walter van Merlaer, but did not mention the name to Ghijs.

‘Where did you stay while you spied on the castle?’

‘We spied only for a few weeks. We set up our tents near Zelzate, in a wood. God help me! The arrow hurts!’

I stood, and told Ywen and Mathis I had promised to help the mercenary back on his feet. Mathis had some experience with nasty wounds such as of arrows. Mathis crouched near Ghijs, put one hand on the man’s shoulder, grinned, then turned on the arrow and turned well, and finally he drew in one shock on the shaft so that the arrow came out with a sucking sound. Mathis must have torn much flesh inside Ghijs’s shoulder, for blood gulped out of the open wound and Ghijs cried out loud in pain. He fainted. He opened his eyes soon.

‘Goddamn you bastards,’ he shouted, ‘you killed me!’

Mathis was staunching the blood.

‘Not at all, but we can serve you in that,’ Mathis said. ‘I am delighted the arrow hurt you real good, Ghijs, scum. I’m even going to hurt you more, for that wound must be cauterised and closed. That will give you much more pain. I’m sorry our lord told us to let you live. So you shall live, but I would have liked to roast you on a spit like the pig you are, man!’

I left Ghijs in the loving care of Ywen, Mathis and Everdey.

I went back to the manor with Quintine. Mathis and his wife brought a fire to near Ghijs. We didn’t bring the mercenary inside the castle. He would enjoy no soft bed in one of our rooms. Mathis placed an old dagger’s blade in the fire, blew on the wood and peat until the blade was red-hot, and then I heard Ghijs scream again, so loudly we shuddered in the manor. A little later, Mathis and Anna came back.

‘He passed out,’ Mathis reported, ‘but we kept him alive. We drew him to the bridge, put straw under him and even drew covers over him. If you ask me, you are way too good with that man. He deserves to die. I would gladly dispatch of him. He will develop a fever when he comes by, but he will live. If it starts raining, we’ll put some kind of a shelter around him, but the women don’t want him inside.’

He grinned, ‘the women rather prefer to cut him slowly to pieces, the women would, but I told them you wanted him alive! They are pissed off with that!’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I want him alive. When he is better, I want him even to be fed and given a horse. Then, we’ll turn him loose. I want to know where he rides to, so one of us should follow him from the far. He may be looking for the road to Zelzate. When he reaches his comrades, we should know what happens in the camp of the mercenaries. If he rides on to Ghent, let him go, and come back to Terhagen.’

‘I’d like to stay here,’ Mathis grinned. ‘Ywen hides better than I.’  
‘Fine,’ I replied. ‘I’ll explain to Ywen.’

Quintine and I found Wivine and the children in the room that led to the escape tunnel. Wivine too waited with a crossbow in her hands, a sword on her belt. She looked more beautiful, more desirable than ever when she was angry and tense. We told her she could come out of the room, the danger had passed.

The same day, we buried the dead mercenaries, with the help of journeymen of Old Terhagen. Ghijs remained lying on our bridge for four days. We gave him water, bread and cheese. When the rains came, we offered him shelter under a structure of wood and canvas. After two days he could sit, and on the fourth day we brought him a horse and put him in the saddle. He did thank us, eyes turned away from us, and rode his horse to a canter, on the road to Axel. When he was at some distance, another rider emerged from the wood and followed him. Ywen would spy on Ghijs from a respectable distance.

Ywen returned to New Terhagen five days later. He reported to me, Everdey and Mathis. ‘The man Ghijs rode to Zelzate indeed. He first rode to Axel, but changed directions. I guess he knew he was being followed, but he did not seem to care much for that. Near Zelzate, he rode into a wood and rode out of the wood again a little later. I found an abandoned camp. There were no tents anymore, only many traces of horses going in all directions. The band broke up. I did not find traces of one larger group leaving into one particular direction. Ghijs must have realised his companions had disbanded. I followed him to west of Ghent. He did not enter Ghent, and turned south. Then, I returned. I rode back. I do believe we are once more safe.’

‘Good,’ was my reaction. ‘We are rid of them.’

This was not the end of the affair, however. Two days later, Ywen, Everdey and Mathis asked for a word with me. I knew what would be coming, so I took them to my hall in the manor. Quintine stood by my side.

‘We wanted to talk,’ Everdey said, slightly embarrassed, ‘because we feel we have some right to know what is happening with this castle. We have been attacked twice, we believe by the same men.’

‘We felt safe and happy so far at this place,’ Ywen continued. ‘Life is agreeable here, we thought we might spend the rest of our days here, see our children grow up in peace, while, of course, guarding the castle against all sorts of hoodlums. We would really like to stay and help defending the manor, but we also feel we should know just how much danger lingers around for us, the women and the children. Knowing what is going on may help us throw up better defences. Are we up against robbers or bandits, or are we up against the men-at-arms of lords?’

‘I understand your issues. I’ll explain what I know,’ I agreed. ‘You deserve an explanation, but I also only recently found out a little about the threat, and got only confirmation by the attack of a few days ago. I should have told you earlier. There may be two separate reasons why we have been assaulted.’

First, two wealthy families of landowners from Ghent dislike me. They don’t want me to expand in new lands near the Scheldt. I bought many polders there, but they think they have a right to all of the polders. They don’t want competition in their turf. So, they try to stop me from buying the best fields, pastures and polders from under their noses. Because of my buying spree, prices of land have gone up, something they don’t like too much, either. They conspired with a third man against me. I can kill those two men, I know who they are, hire

mercenaries, bandits, and killers, but that would only start a war between families of Ghent and lead to worse. I own now enough lands near the Scheldt, I'll prefer from this day on to buy fields farther north, more into Zeeland and in the region around Antwerp. I'll stay away from the poorters of Ghent for a while. I don't think they will expose themselves by mixing with hired mercenaries again, after the debacle of last. I also threatened lately to send the count and his bailiffs against them.

The real threat, the dangerous threat, is the second one, and I still cannot really put my hands on that mystery. The man on horseback Everdey shot was called Raymond de Vitry. I haven't spoken to that man before, but we've met at a banquet in Ghent. He also ambushed me near Hulst, when I was injured, and I've seen him with the two landowner-poorters of Ghent I spoke of, the men from the de Mey and van Merlaer families. Raymond de Vitry was not at all a poorter of Ghent! He came from the Champagne region, but apparently, he dealt with the poorters of Ghent I named, in trading for the fairs of the Champagne and Ghent. I suppose he was a cloth trader, associated with the poorters and weavers of Ghent. Honestly, I really don't know the motives of de Vitry for wanting to kill me, but that was what the attacks were about. He told me before he died. I, Jehan Terhagen, only, was the target of his attacks. I have some clues. The name of my mother was de Vitry too, and Raymond de Vitry called me his cousin. In a way, I too am a member of the de Vitry family, though I have never met them. I have never been to the Champagne. Raymond de Vitry wanted me dead. Ghijs, the wounded mercenary, confirmed this. De Vitry hired mercenaries for the job. He paid the men, although I would not be surprised to learn also the poorter-landowners of Ghent I mentioned paid their part. De Vitry dead, there is nobody left to pay for the mercenaries, and the poorters will not expose themselves by hiring in their own name such bandits. The band of mercenaries must have split and disappeared to the four winds, as Ywen confirmed.'

'The poorters of Ghent might still pay for the mercenaries under false names,' Mathis mentioned.

'They could, yes,' I admitted, 'but I really believe they will not do such a thing. They don't want to be linked with mercenaries. It would destroy their reputation. They also lack the courage for such venture. They will not risk touching directly a relative of the mistress of the Count of Male, of our friend Heyla de Smet, who lives at Beoostenblijje.'

The men looked in astonishment at one another, then they grinned.

'So, with Raymond de Vitry dead, we should be safe at New Terhagen?' Mathis asked.

'I'm not sure of that,' I said to the truth. 'Raymond de Vitry came to us to kill me. Whether that was because of reasons of only himself or of someone else, I don't know. There was a plot against me, but I don't know how many men of the Champagne are involved in the plot, and why. The mercenaries came to kill me, not to rob, pillage, destroy New Terhagen, though they would have done that in the effort. In essence, they wanted me. Why?'

I shrugged my shoulders.

'So the assaults may start again, under someone else's command,' Mathis concluded.

'Maybe,' I nodded, 'maybe not. To find out, I'll have to travel to a place in the Champagne called Provins, maybe also to Vitry itself, for a town of the same name exists. The answers to the mystery of the attacks on me are to be found in the Champagne. Raymond de Vitry told me to go there and look for a man called Pierre de Vitry. This Pierre de Vitry may be the commander of the attacks, or maybe not. I'll have to find out on my own.'

'Then we ride to the city of Provins,' Mathis concluded.

'No, definitely not,' I shook my head. 'The Champagne is from five to ten days from here on horseback. You are to remain here. You are needed to defend New Terhagen. Our women and children are here. Mathis, I will be turning the castle over to your guardianship. From now on, you are the bailiff of New and Old Terhagen. Well, only the count can appoint bailiffs, but it

is the same function I ask from you. It is my task to find out why somebody wants to kill me. The reason lies in the Champagne. I am to ride to Provins. I will be away from the castle for a couple of months at the most. You all are to stay here, and defend Terhagen!’

‘We are not letting you ride alone on such a journey, which concerns us all,’ Everdey protested. ‘I am growing fat. I’ll stay at New Terhagen with Mathis. Have Ywen ride with you, or even me!’

‘No,’ I refused, ‘and I am the lord of Terhagen! I ride, you stay. I wouldn’t want to have it any other way. Also, one lone man on a horse will learn things more easily than three obvious warriors. No, I ride, you stay! Moreover, New Terhagen may be attacked again until all is solved. You stay and take care! That is definite! Tomorrow, I ride to Provins. I may need a month or so to find out why somebody wants me killed. After two months, if I haven’t returned by then, please consider as masters of New Terhagen my wife Wivine and her sister. They will decide what to do. I would really like you all to stay here, raise your children to adulthood, and to defend the place and the people I love. You belong to New Terhagen now, as much as I do, and as my son will. This is your home!’

‘Tomorrow, I ride for Provins,’ I repeated.

\*\*\*\*\*

And so I did. I had never really travelled so far. First, I rode to the convent of Ter Hage to write down the names of the towns I would have to pass on the road, good landmarks, and to copy very crudely the roads leading to the Champagne. The nuns could give me an indication of the distances. I could not travel by boat. I would ride. Mother Amelberga might also tell me what I needed for such a voyage.

While I advanced on the road to ter Hage, I had the impression eyes followed my movements. I felt eyes burning in my back, and I was annoyed by that feeling. Was it a real feeling or had my suspicious nature forced me to doubt? I held my horse a few times on the road, shifting this or that on my saddle or on the reins, and glanced then over the spine of the horse or from under the belly of the animal, and I did remark a lean rider on a brown horse way behind me on the road. I noticed the same figure and the same horse several times. I didn’t see the figure when a wood or high bushes obstructed the views, as the rider might have used these to hide. Did the rider wait for the right occasion to ambush me? He never rode in front of me, though. I would have to ambush him to learn who he was and why he followed me.

I didn’t stay long at Ter Hage, merely one day, and laughed with my mystery companion when I saw the rain pouring down outside the convent. I rode out the following day, and slept in the open, in a wood, but I wasn’t at ease, knowing somebody followed me. I rode on. I rode around Ghent, had no need to enter the city. There, I thought I had lost the rider, but way south I noticed him once more, among a group of travellers. I then developed a game of hide and seek. I rode fast stretches through woods where he could not possibly follow me, I galloped some mornings for hours, instead of sheltering when it rained. I rode on, but somehow the rider caught up with me, found my trail. The game annoyed me in the end. I decided to ambush him. I rode into a dense wood beside the road, but backtracked and stood in waiting. The horse rider passed cautiously, and I rode after him. I galloped to catch up with him. He had been unsuspecting until then, probably thinking I was somewhere ahead, but he heard me coming, turned his head, and I almost dropped from my horse from astonishment, for the flaming red hair that burst from a brown cap was all too familiar to me! The rider stopped, realising she had been caught.

‘Quintine, what the hell are you doing here?’ I shouted angrily.

‘You should not go alone to Provins, Jehan!’ she shouted back, but not too sure of herself.

‘Who knows what dumb things you may do next! If you think you can disappear without me or Wivine knowing what happens, or what you intend, you are mistaken. You take me with you, Jehan, or I swear I’m riding on my own to Provins, and I’ll be waiting for you in that damned place of the Champagne before you arrive!’

If I knew one thing about the Denout sisters, it was that when they had something on their mind you had to be someone else but me to make them forget about it, and if that someone had wanted to try, he or she could be my guest, for the Denout twins had heads of black stone. They also considered themselves superior specimen of the human race, up to any challenge. Quintine had resolved to follow me to hell and back, and so she would.

I tried another line, ‘have you abandoned our children, Quintine? What kind of mother are you?’

It was a heartless argument, and I regretted instantly having brought it up.

Quintine threw back at me, ‘the children are cared for by Wivine. She is as much a mother to your children as I am! Don’t tell me I am a bad mother, Jehan! What kind of a mother would I be to let you go off on your own, dumb as you are, and not bring their father back to my children? They have two mothers, but only one father. How do you think you are going to come back to Ghent without me helping you? Wivine agreed I had to follow you!’

Quintine meant what she said. I began to laugh, so she knew I was not angry anymore, but I had therefore lost all authority. I have never been a man the twins regarded as their lord and master. I was their lover and brother, the lord of their heart, but not the lord of their mind. It was time to reconcile. Quintine would never turn back. I leaned on my horse’s neck. Maybe a man and his wife on the road were a better disguise than a lonely traveller, I tried to convince myself. As ever, too, Quintine had appealed to my better, gentler feelings. I truly hated to be far from my beloved Quintine. So I, weaker then, poor, stupid, love-sick, damn feeble-minded Jehan Terhagen, I relented, and I was convinced she could read the pleasure from my face. ‘All right, Quintine,’ I surrendered piteously. ‘We’ll ride together, then. At the least danger, however, you ride back to Terhagen!’

She didn’t even grant me the courtesy to say she agreed on that point. She continued looking smugly and defiantly at me.

We rode on, side by side, Quintine grinning, I making angry eyes for a couple of days. We rode as man and wife from Ghent over Waregem and Kortrijk to Lille, which we did not enter, we avoided all towns. We rode on to Valenciennes, where we rested two full days, because we were tired. We were tired also from sleeping outside in the open air, sometimes under a canvas while the rain pelted on us, sleeping in each other’s arms. From Valenciennes we travelled south to Cambrai, or Kamerrijk as the town was called in Flemish, and from there we rode to Saint-Quentin, then over Soissons to Château-Thierry, Montmirail, and further south to Esternay. We slept at inns on those roads. A priest showed us the road to Villiers-Saint-Georges, and from there we were close to Provins. We rode more slowly then, reaching our aim only after ten days of riding. Quintine did not complain once, but I could have been in Provins a few days earlier on my own and had I changed horses on the way. We had the money to change horses, which we didn’t. We had the money, for we had both had the same idea, given by the same person, our friend Mathis, to sew golden and silver coins in the hems of our cloaks, saddle-cloths and jerkins. Anna had done the sewing for both of us! I would have to have a serious chat about loyalty with those two when I returned! Finally, we saw the walls of Provins rise from out of the plains in front of us.

We rode slowly on, past part of the impressive walls, and entered the walled city by the main gate. The entry to the town of Provins was very heavily guarded. No less than six guards stood there, dressed in leather jerkins and armed with swords and spears. They knew their business, too. They scrutinised each visitor, looked at what weapons entered, inspected the carts thoroughly, and directed the merchants into the tax house. The gates of Provins were an impressive complex of architecture. Saint-John's Gate was a massive structure of two round towers, which stood menacing at either side. The visitors had to pass a long, covered corridor before the wooden gate, between the towers. I looked up and saw guards standing there too, high above the passing people. From above also the gates could be defended, and I imagined caskets of oil there, which could be thrown in boiling oil-falls of horror on assailers. The stones on this side were thick and high. Garrison troops walked on the ramparts. Two men could easily walk next to each other there, and the men were protected from the outside by crenelated upper walls. Every hundred feet or so the walls were fortified by towers, which extended outwards, so that the area beneath could be covered by crossbowmen. The stout towers were the barbicans of the city, and there were many of them. On each tower flew flags, as if to notify that they were all occupied by men-at-arms. The banners wore the badge of the Counts of Champagne: a blue field with a white band across from upper left to lower right and two golden lines on each side of the white. These colours contrasted nicely with the white and grey bevelled stones of the walls. The defences of Provins seemed relatively new. They were made not of bricks but of large stones, which may have bleached in the sun and were devoid of green foliage or moss. Below the walls was a moat, filled with bracken water. The moat also ran around the entire town, at least as far as I could see. The impression I had was one of orderly cleanliness, for all this was well maintained and kept free of bushes. Provins was not only a town but also a formidable fortress! Everything indicated a wealthy town.

I should have come to Provins for inspiration for the building of the walls of my castle. I thought then again how useless the crenelated platforms of the towers of my gatehouse were! I should have covered the towers with conical or pyramidal slated roofs, and have kept as lookout only the windows in the highest level room, maybe have larger windows, with strong iron bars in front of the openings. That would have deterred entirely the attackers from climbing up their ladder! One was never too old to learn, I thought. I would have to see to the modifications after my return to Terhagen.

We stood in a queue at the *Saint Jean Gate*, so many people tried to get in, and there was a grumbling and shouts of people complaining that more guards had to be foreseen to serve the men and women that entered. We passed through the gates at last, walked our horses along a wide street of stone houses, and arrived at a market square.

Provins was one of the main towns of fairs in the Champagne. It was situated at the crossing of at least twenty roads. Goods arrived here from the four wind directions. Carts showed up from Flanders and Picardy and from the German lands, laden with huge bales of wool and linen, with hides, wood, glassware, earthenware, pots and jewels. These would be sent south and west, towards Paris, Caen, Nantes, and to Aquitaine, to Bordeaux and Montpellier. From the south came spices, honey, silk, armour and weapons, copper pots, and tanned leather and many more goods. These would be taken north and east. The centre of this trade was Provins' market square! The market square showed all the signs of a wealthy town: stone houses, slated roofs, straight and wide streets filled with people. We settled for an inn on the square, told the hosteler we were traders from Flanders wishing to visit Provins and inform us about the fairs. We received a large, clean room after we had come up with a handful of silver coins, and we had a nice view over the square. Our horses would be cared for in a nearby farm.

Quintine threw herself on the bed, exhausted but satisfied. She too liked this city and its defences, even though it could not be compared to Ghent, which was ten times larger. She had been thrilled by the trip, the landscapes she had seen, the people we had met. She had also been a fine companion, and I feared she would soon again be with child.

‘What are we going to do now?’ she asked, sighing from sheer joy, stretching her limbs on the bed like a kitten, stifling a yawn.

I imagined I could actually hear Quintine purring.

‘We came here to find one Pierre de Vitry,’ I said, putting down our bags in a corner of the room. ‘So, Pierre de Vitry it is who we are going to see.’

‘That could be dangerous,’ Quintine remarked. ‘Pierre de Vitry may be the man who drew the strings on Raymond de Vitry. And how are we going to find this Pierre? We can hardly go and stand in the middle of the market square and begin shouting you want to meet this man. He may find you first and kill you instantly. You mentioned your real name to the inn-keeper!’

‘No,’ I smiled, knowing I should indeed have used another name. ‘We go smartly at it. We ask questions, ask our way around in the town. We have a look at a house, look at it from all sides in admiration, and ask, “might this be the house of Pierre de Vitry? We heard he had such a fine house!” Then we wait for a reaction. Nine times out of ten the man or woman will say, “but no, Vitry lives on the other side, there, or in that other street!” That is how to proceed!’

‘Oh yes, yes,’ Quintine said, ‘I wasn’t thinking right! And then we continue the conversation and ask whether Monsieur de Vitry is an old man or a young man, whether he is married or single, and especially, whether he is a nice fellow or not, and so on. You may propose a cup of ale or a cup of wine in a tavern, and continue the conversation there, asking for who would be fine trading partners, and so on, but always coming back to de Vitry, fishing for one added detail after the other. Can I do something like that with the women of Provins?’

‘Yes, darling, you can, but then we walk separately and you had better put on other, more feminine clothes, and not show too much how incredibly beautiful you really are. Constrict your breasts a little, and don’t flutter your eyelids too much. You know the colour red attracts bulls, and your fully deployed shoulder-long flaming hair shall make every man of Provins turn around.’

Quintine purred again on that compliment, and opened her arms.

We strolled around Provins the next day, until we knew the outlay of the town by heart, every street corner, every inn, every square, every church of the town, and we even ventured close to the palace of the Count. We strolled along the houses, which had fine façades of half-timbering. We saw the church of Saint Ayoul, and of course the Caesar Tower, the structure that was also drawn in the standard of the town. Provins was not large, but the palace with its keep and chapel was grander and more massive than many other castles. Provins also had a wonderful large barn, entirely made of stone, so that it resembled a manor, with two floors and a vast cellar. The barn was used as a covered market. There were two entrances at that building, one to the ground floor with just two stairs, and one at the right side leading to the first floor with many stone stairs. It was a huge hall, the liveliest place of the town, with many people standing and chatting outside. Merchants and farmers came here to propose their produce. They displayed their cloth, silk and lace, linen and woollen cloths on wooden tables or simply placed on the floors. The sellers haggled with buyers over the prices. We strolled two entire days, but I didn’t let Quintine wander about on her own. Who could tell where she would have ended in? I was probably very jealous and didn’t want to lose her.

We walked, admired the fine houses in Saint John's Street and beyond. I tried my scheme of entering a conversation a few times, but drew blanks. I tried at the count's palace, with the same effect. Tongues remained glued against teeth in Provins! Finally, I must have sulked a little, for things were not going well this way, and Quintine was all the more content with my discomfiture. I then said it was Quintine's turn to try something. Quintine simply went up to an elegantly dressed woman, and asked where we could find a man called Pierre de Vitry. The woman looked us over, gauged us, must have noticed immediately we wore fine clothes, so she said, mellowing, 'Monsieur de Vitry lives in the farm near Saint John's Gate. I heard he was ill, though. Ask at the farm for him. He will see you. He is a nice man. A good day to you,' and she trotted on, turning her back to us. I won't describe the triumphant look I got from Quintine.

We decided to walk to the farm and push our luck. We had actually seen the farm, while entering by the main gate. We reached the building, lingered a while there, but saw nothing special. It was a farm as rich as many stood in Flanders, a square building closed by high walls and a monumental gate. All was quiet in this part of the town. The gate of the farm stood wide open. We strolled into the courtyard. Champagne farms were as rich as our polder farms, I noted. We remarked the long and high barns, the horse-stables, and a rather small manor at the other end. No one was around, so I called out. Quintine knocked on the door of the manor. A middle-aged maidservant opened the door, startled to see somebody so near. I asked, 'I wondered whether we could have a word with Monsieur Pierre de Vitry, good woman. Can you please announce us to him?'

'The lord is very ill and does not receive visitors,' the servant refused. She readied to close the door on us.

'We have travelled from Flanders, from far away, and we are on family business,' I told. 'Please ask your master to receive us. My name is de Vitry too!'

The maidservant looked at us with more attention yet still startled, but then she said, 'wait here, please. I'll ask the master whether he can see you after all.'

She closed the door on our noses. We would not be allowed to wait inside.

A few moments later, the servant came back, opening the door wide. She invited us in. We were led to a room on the same floor, not a large room, but a comfortable one, lined with fine oak and a few smaller tapestries. In the room stood a table and chairs. Near the hearth sat an old man with an emaciated face, dressed in a tunic and a heavy cloak lined with furs hanging around his shoulders. A purring cat slept on his knees. I had remarked no dogs barked in the courtyard. It was warm in the room, too warm. We advanced to near him. He looked and stared at us, studied us, said nothing at first. We were uneasy, did not know what to say. I thought this old, maybe dying man could not have wished us harm.

After a while, which made the waiting very uneasy for us, he said, 'take a chair and sit by me. Who are you, to claim the Vitry name? I don't know you!'

'My mother's name was Marthe de Vitry,' I began. 'She married a knight from the north, named Ter Hage. I'm afraid they have both been killed during a revolt in Flanders, a long time ago. I am their only surviving child and son, Jehan Terhagen.'

The old man's eyes revived. He looked up and studied me again. He became quite excited. 'Yes,' the old man nodded. 'I recognise your mother's features, faint, but unmistakable. You have her eyes, too. And who might this young woman be?'

I simplified matters.

'This is my wife,' I lied without blushing, for Quintine was as much my wife as Wivine was. 'She is called Quintine Denout, a poorter's daughter of the city of Ghent in the county of Flanders.'

‘I see. What have you come to my house for?’

‘I live in a castle in northern Flanders,’ I explained, ‘on the domains of my father. My castle has been attacked several times. A man who was the leader of groups of mercenaries, was killed. He was called by the name of Raymond de Vitry. He told me, when dying, to go to Provins and ask for a Pierre de Vitry. I would like the attacks to stop. I hoped I could find answers for the aggressions in Provins, to have the assaults on my castle stopped. Too many men have died in the effort.’

De Vitry resumed, ‘so you are Marthe’s son, are you? And you live in a castle, so you must be rich.’

Pierre de Vitry sighed.

‘You bring images of very long ago to life, young man. Marthe was my daughter, so you are my grandson. The assaults on your castle will stop with Raymond’s life. I suspected he would do stupid and bad things. Raymond was never any good. Sit down, I’ll explain!’

We took a chair, and listened to a long and sad story.

‘I am indeed Pierre de Vitry,’ the old man told, whispering.

His voice was feeble and slow, his French distinguished and clear.

‘Our family was a glorious one! We have been stewards, *prévôts*, provosts, of the counts of Champagne since ever. I have served the kings of France to whose crown domains the Champagne was joined when Jeanne de Champagne, our last countess, married the man who would become Philip IV the Fair of France. Philip inherited the Champagne from Jeanne, and he didn’t hesitate grabbing the county. It is ironic that Flanders resisted so long its annexation to the French crown domains against the same king, whereas the Champagne was incorporated so peacefully into the crown territories. That happened really in 1305 when Jeanne died, but also against the will of men who dearly loved our county. We, the de Vitrys, have been knighted by the counts and generously rewarded for our services. We are noblemen. I own a castle near Vitry, but I prefer the cosiness, the warmth and the protection of Provins, my beloved city. I have friends here, and I like to mingle with the masses once every while.

Marthe, your mother, was my only daughter. I had two sons, but they died in the service of the kings of France. Marthe was my only heir. She fell in love with your father against my will and permission. I considered your father a nice young man, intelligent, polite, kind and courageous, but I wanted your mother to marry a lord of the land, someone to whom I could hand over my estate after my death, for instance to her cousin, on the side of my father’s brother, the son of my uncle’s son, Guy de Vitry. I didn’t particularly like that cousin, but he was far family, had the same name as I, and so the estates I had inherited could be passed on to another de Vitry.

When Marthe fell in love with your father and eloped from me, I was so angry I repudiated her, and told everybody I didn’t want to see her again. I was the lord de Vitry, in my family, everybody had to obey me, also my daughter! Later, much later, I regretted saying that bitterly, but by then, Marthe had left Provins and I never heard of her again. I didn’t know to where she had fled, and I didn’t send out messengers to find her trace. I was too proud to investigate on where she lived.’

Pierre de Vitry paused, breathed hard and with difficulty, then he resumed.

‘The man who was supposed to marry your mother, Guy de Vitry, married another woman and had a son who was Raymond de Vitry. Raymond was even less a good man than his father. Guy married a real witch of a woman, ambitious and greedy. She was a relatively wealthy woman, but much of her wealth has been squandered by Guy and by Raymond. We have no other family. Raymond de Vitry knew, of course, I was dying. I had to give up

servicing the counts of Champagne two years ago. Raymond traded in cloth with Ghent. I suppose he wanted to lay his hands on my estates by having you killed, out of his way for the inheritance of de Vitry, and in the same effort gain possession of your lands. He would have been the only heir of me and of you. He would have needed to kill also your children you have, no doubt, with your lovely lady here, but that would not have withheld him from his wicked plot. Raymond was a murderer and a thief, a shame for our family. By killing you, I understand clearly now, he would have been the only living heir to the domains of my branch of de Vitry, and inherit also your father's domains and fortune. I have been so blind!

Pierre de Vitry coughed.

'I'm sorry, I have told you in hard words what must have happened. You are my grandson, Jehan Terhagen. Raymond has no children and his wife has died. You will be the only heir now of the de Vitry lands, castle and manors and farms, and also the heir of Raymond de Vitry, for the family on his mother's side, a brood of deranged people, have died out. You should have brought documents proving Raymond's death, but I can give witness you are speaking the truth, and sign documents that will guarantee you say who you are. We must be quick, though. I am dying. I must make amends. I made my daughter miserable by rejecting her. She did not deserve that fate. She was a good girl. She was only that, though, a woman, and women have always done what I ordered them to do, except Marthe, except Marthe, and that was the problem!'

I stammered, 'grandfather? You are my grandfather? I thought my family had died out, on my mother's side, as well as on my father's side!'

'Marthe would not have talked about me. I have been cruel and heartless the last time she confronted me. She was beautiful, elegant, intelligent, but as headstrong as I was.'

Pierre de Vitry sighed again. 'We must not be sentimental, now. Sentiment is what we can afford when we are alone, and when we think of God and of our errors. I also have never been a sentimental man. My late wife was, but I did not despise her for that weakness, for I loved her. Some of my property of now was hers, of course. Do you have much property in lands? Land is ultimately always the best investment. Lands are a man's surety.'

'I do,' I granted. 'My father was a knight. He owned domains with his brother in Flanders, but the entire family was killed in a revolt. I was saved by a poorster of Ghent, who raised me as his son. Later, I bought more lands, swamp lands called polders near the River Scheldt, but swamps can be dried out and then be exploited as fine farmlands, fields and pastures. I suppose I should be called a rich man. The lands are not given in feudal fief! They are my naked and total property! I own farms too, and I built me a castle some distance from the large town of Ghent, near a town called Axel.'

'Marthe was a clever girl. Your father was a man of honour. I should have recognised all of that. You have your parents' mind! Good God, how much I longed to see Marthe again! I didn't want to die alone. You tell me my Marthe died. So sad!'

Pierre de Vitry stooped speaking, wept a tear from his eye, head bowed. He held the silence. Images of old must have passed in his mind.

Finally, he said, 'well then, we must settle matters right. I have still much to explain to you both. I must also show you the property deeds of my lands and estates. My notary is a friend, living here in Provins. He can transfer all to your name. Also Raymond's properties must be transferred to you. I insist on that! I'll see to it that if anything goes wrong, the lineages of Champagne will intervene in your favour. There will be no more a de Vitry as steward of the counts of Champagne and of the kings of France, but that should not be too sad a thing. The world has become far too complicated for the de Vitry to be continuing their work of old. Nevertheless, you must add the title of de Vitry to your name, my grandson. I would like that

also to be arranged. Indulge an old man! Our lineage must not end. Do this for me! We must talk and talk and talk, for there is so much I would like to hear from you. If you are Marthe's son, you must be a good boy. Talk! Tell me who you are, how you live, how many children you have, describe me your lands, your farms, yours servants, your friends. Tell me about the great city of Ghent. Foremost, tell me what you remember of your mother, and I'll tell you how she was when she was a girl. You must stay here, of course, until the heritage is agreed upon. Then I can die in peace!'

And so we spoke. For days on we scraped together all the memories we could recall. Quintine and I even moved from the inn to the farm of Saint John. Quintine became the lady of the manor, declared to be so by the old Pierre de Vitry to his servants. My grandfather called in the bailiff of Provins, and he settled matters. Not one but three notaries were necessary to gather all the parchments, to make a list of the de Vitry possessions. Pierre de Vitry made me his only heir in official documents. Also the state of Raymond de Vitry, declared deceased, witnessed by me, was transferred to the old man, and would he inherited by me. These last estates amounted to much less than what the stewards of the counts of Champagne had assembled over the centuries of service, but it still added to a fortune. I had to visit the lands, the castle, the manors, and I marvelled at the wealth that would be mine. I shuddered when I looked at the list, for with what I owned in Flanders, it was all too much for one man! And I still had to think about adding to the Pharaïldis lands!

We also visited Vitry. It was not much of a town at that time. It had been burned down centuries ago, but another town with the same name was in the making, and thrived. The lands there and around Provins, which would come to me, formed a great fortune. From Vitry, Quintine and I returned to Provins. Pierre de Vitry was happy when he saw what kind of connivance linked us, me and Quintine.

Old men die either when all hope is lost for them, or when all their hopes have come true. Pierre de Vitry died one month after we arrived in Provins, content and with his hand in mine. He did not die alone.

We buried him in Provins and the church of Saint Ayoul was filled with people at his funeral. His domains and fortune was transferred rapidly to me, to his grandson and only heir. He kept urging before his death to take on the name of de Vitry. I have not done that, for I had to honour my father too, but I added my grandfather's name to my own, and long afterwards I received a charter granted by the court of France, accepting this. My name is now then Ser Jehan Vresele van Ter Hage de Vitry, but in Ghent I remained simply Jehan Terhagen.

I found a steward for the farm of Saint John in Provins, and an impoverished knight to oversee my domains in Champagne. I promised the man a fortune for his honest services or a grave for his dishonesty, but I had heard from traders of Provins I could trust him. I didn't trust him, however! I would trust no man with such richness as the de Vitry possessed. Sooner or later, I would have to return to Provins and come to live in a castle or a manor of the Champagne to manage my lands and control the accounts. I would have to give the management of my lands and farms near Ghent in the care of somebody else, or forsake the Vitry domains. I was very much tempted to leave Ghent for Vitry, and let Martin Denout manage my property. But how would Wivine and Quintine react on me asking them to come and live more than two hundred miles from their family and friends of Ghent? How would our friends in the castle of New Terhagen feel about me leaving Flanders? How could I abandon the castle I had built with my own hands, and which I loved? How could I go and live far from my beloved Ghent? How could I renege on the lands left to me by my murdered father?

Why had fate forced me to choose between the heritage of my mother and the one of my father? Had I not high duties to both of them? For the moment, I decided not to choose and to travel between my domains in Flanders and in France, but sooner or later I knew I would have to!

My mind was torn with these doubts and worries, right at the moment Count Louis of Male's armies invaded Brabant.

### Bad Wednesday at Scheut

The truce signed at Asse and concluded between Count Louis of Male and Duke Wenceslas of Luxemburg, was broken by the cities of Brabant and by Joanna of Brabant on the fifteenth of July of 1356. The army of Flanders invaded Brabant a second time. The count's army, consisting of militiamen from the cities and of the knights of the countryside, as well as of the cities, gathered near the river Dender between Geeraardsbergen and Ninove. A good road led directly from Ninove to Brussels, the capital of Brabant. Ghent once more contributed over seven thousand militiamen and men-at-arms of the knights of the town. Once more also, the weavers did not send members of their guilds, so the militia were formed only of members of the small guilds and of the fullers. Very quickly, on the ninth of August, the Flemish columns marched from Ninove to Brussels, avoiding the obstacle formed by the impregnable fortress of the abbey of Affligem, where a strong garrison of about five hundred men-at-arms of the duchy of Brabant occupied the stronghold. The army passed the frontier with Brabant on the thirteenth of August.

Count Louis of Male and his military councillors left little to chance. The offensive of the count was launched from four directions.

Louis of Male's main army moved in forced marches from Ninove to Brussels, marching from the north-west.

The count's fleet sailed to Antwerp.

Count William of Namur marched from the south-east with his troops in alliance with Flanders from the frontier with Namur to Nivelles and Geldenaken over Gembloux in the direction of Tienen.

Finally, troops of the bishop of Liège advanced from the east, from Hannut to Sint-Truiden. The army of Flanders pillaged and burned the Brabant villages in its wake, sowing panic in Brussels and Leuven, the two main towns of Brabant. Lombeek, Meerbeek, Wambeek, Dilbeek, Pamel and Scheepdael were thus destroyed.

Louis of Male had chosen his lines of attack well, for among the cities with contingents of militiamen, only the aldermen of the towns of Brussels and Leuven were found willing to protect the duchy of Brabant. The smaller towns were reluctant to send their militia against the Flemish hordes, and the bishop of Liège, as well as the count of Namur openly supported Louis of Male. The count of Hainault preferred to remain neutral in the conflict, and Emperor Charles IV remained in the luxury of his castle and city of Prague in Bohemia, very far from Brabant. Duke Wenceslas, moreover, was at Maastricht. He sulked there after the insult done to him by the aldermen and the most powerful men of the duchy by refusing his treaty and truce with Flanders. Wenceslas held banquets at Maastricht as if nothing still concerned him about Brabant. He amused himself with his friends.

Brussels and Leuven sought help at the courts of France and England. Another mission was sent to Pope Innocent VI. These delegations arrived too late! Gerard van der Heyden, the lord of Boutersem and Walter Herenmaes of Leuven did travel to the court of Edward III, but they were caught in the North Sea by the famed pirate Morant, made prisoners and ransomed, which became only known after the campaign of the Flemish in Brabant was already finished.

The army of Brabant advanced against the Flemish army, and Duke Wenceslas hurried to Brussels, bypassing the town, not entering it, and joining the army immediately. The main war leader of the *Brabanders*, who fought for Joanna of Brabant, the rightful heiress, was Geert von Jülich, count of Berg, the eldest son of William von Jülich, called in Flemish Gulik. The count of Berg preferred to withdraw to close to Brussels.

The Flemish army set up camp near the fields of Scheut, in sight of the impressive walls of the city. The army of Brabant stood against and in front of these walls of the capital.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinric Vresele had sore feet. He was not used at all to days of marching, and on this campaign the knights in command had forced the men vigorously on. Heinric, the clerk, had walked among the militiamen of the small guilds of Ghent. He had been given the command of a group of twenty men, among which Wouter de Smet and Clais de Hert, who were in their early twenties. Heinric, thirty, was barely older than they. Boudin Vresele and Martin Denout had declined joining the army, which Heinric found scandalous, but, of course, Boudin, his brother, was involved in intricate trading negotiations and ventures with Vresele money and with funds of the Pharaïldis families to supply the army. Martin Denout lived in the countryside and used as subterfuge to not appear because of his work of managing the land properties of the Pharaïldis, but he also supplied the army with food. Boudin van Lake might have accompanied the Flemish warriors of Ghent. He wanted to, but Boudin was only sixteen, so Gillis Vresele and also Avezoete and Alise van Lake had refused arduously to let him go. Moreover, Boudin was inscribed in the guild of the weavers. The militia of the weavers were still not properly organised, and not allowed to march in group with the count of Flanders. The Pharaïldis patriarchs had not particularly encouraged the Pharaïldis youngsters to engage in the war with the militia, but as they were allied with the count, they had also not much discouraged the young men with stories of the horrors of war.

Clais de Hert should have been organising the transport over the rivers and canals of the goods for the army, but he had persuaded his father to manage this on his own.

Heinric Vresele had marched among the more than five thousand men provided by the small guilds of Ghent to the count's army, by far the largest group, and with the almost two thousand fullers. Heinric had to be a leader of men, but with boys like Wouter and Clais in his group, he couldn't exert much authority! His men usually did as he ordered, but only when they considered his orders sensible. Otherwise, they just did as they pleased, in block, and the young men of his group rather tended to follow Wouter and Clais than him, Heinric. Heinric was merely a clerk, so not really a man inclined to violence. He did show the glibness the boys found useful for instance when one had to explain to knights or heavily armoured men on horseback why they were marching on soft grass, cutting through pastures at bends in the road instead of following docilely the other groups. Heinric had also discovered in himself a special cunning to point out farms or cottages that did not seem very rich from the outside, but which promised hoards of gold and silver inside. Heinric had a nose for discovering hidden places under hearth-stones, where pots of coins and jewels had been placed. Heinric's group had pillaged better and gained more riches already than any other group in the army. He found

food when there was none to have, clean water when most of the wells only delivered drab, mucky water, and he brought his men to small woods on the flanks of the hills so that their tents could be set up in more or less sheltered places, sheltered from the beating sun in daytime, and sheltered from winds and rain in the evening and night.

Heinric wore a chain mail that dropped to just beneath his knees. He had fine, light but steel greaves to protect his shins, and he walked with half-boots in supple calf's leather that allowed him speed and comfort for his feet on the march. From his father, he had recuperated a beautifully engraved steel breastplate, decorated with a rampant lion, the lion of Flanders. He had polished this plate with sand and ash and water, so that it shone in the bright light of summer. He shone like an Alexander, he thought, and he was sure he could learn the Brabanders a dire lesson. His arms were left unprotected, but for the sleeves of a leather jerkin he wore between mail and breastplate. He had bought a new steel helmet from the de Smets, not a pot helmet, but a cylindrical one, which covered his entire head until his shoulders. Heinric had sought a helmet that covered not only his face, but also the front and back of his neck, having heard too often horrible stories about men who had received nasty sword slashes in the back of the neck and thrusts of daggers through their main artery in front. For weapons, he wore a long dagger at his leather belt, a sword too, and he clinched a *goedendag* in his hand, a weapon with a longer wooden shaft than was customary in the Flemish army of Ghent. On his back, he wore his backpack, in which he kept a few personal utensils, a little bread for the road, a little water, a few clothes, a small knife and fork and a small pewter plate to eat from, and a cup. Above the pack, he now also wore his wooden shield, equally painted with a black rampant lion on a yellow background. Heinric had also received from his brother Evrard, the *Fremineuren* monk, a few images of saints and a beautiful medallion engraved with the image of Saint Pharaïldis. This hung on a tiny gold chain on his neck, under his mail and jerkin. Heinric vowed a special devotion to Pharaïldis, the patron saint of his family. His men saw him kissing the medallion in the morning and evening. With his broad chest and upper body thickened by the layers of armour, his long, skinny legs protruding beneath, Heinric Vresele had something of a grasshopper in this campaign. He was therefore quickly nicknamed *Heinric the grasshopper* in his battalion.

‘We have no salt anymore, *hoofdman*! Shall we go and ask Heinric the grasshopper for some?’

Yes, Heinric had salt when others had not.

Heinric's militiamen were similarly dressed and they had brought similar weapons. All wore chain mails, though mostly only shorter and lighter haubergeons, no breastplates and no greaves. Common pot helms or sallets, broad-rimmed helmets, dangled on their heads or hung on their backpacks. Their weapons consisted of a dagger, a sword, a *goedendag*, and a shield of wood decorated with the badges of their guilds or of Flanders. Heinric preferred his shield on his back during a march. He wanted to have a clear view and free hands. A few men among the guildsmen wore battle-axes, or spears.

Although Heinric was no warrior – he shrank from violence, from violent gestures and violent words in Ghent. He liked to march in the presence of his boys as he called them, though most of the men who walked in his group had passed adolescence and were between twenty and thirty years old, as old as he was. Veterans of previous revolts and battles had not been assigned to his group. Heinric did like to walk, to sleep and eat in the midst of the young men who were all well-educated, yet well-muscled and strong, athletic-bodied young men with broad chests, healthy-looking red faces and sturdy legs. He liked it when the men tore their chain-mails over their shoulders in the evening, and then their underwear, to catch the last

warming sunrays on a naked torso, or when they plunged into a river or canal to wash and swim. Heinric loved following the profiles of the young men with his eyes, noticing the handsomeness of each. He cherished the smell of their bodies, their sweat or the smell of the water over their chests, their open and loud laughter, their hoarse curses, as well as the way they killed a pig or fowl to roast over a campfire in the evening. Maybe he did not enjoy much authority, but he had been delegated in command of the group, and he exerted that right often on the ones he could impress with his shrill voice. How he would behave in battle, he systematically refused to think about!

Heinric had few friends in Ghent. It was only lately he had met men of the van Artevelde family who had been banished from Ghent, then recently called back by the count. Heinric considered the van Arteveldes mysterious, legendary men, a little dangerous and risky because of their background, whereas he was eager to please the aldermen of Ghent, the men who were members of the old aristocratic landowner-poorters, the knights of the town, as well as the count and the count's men. With these, he always acted very politely and did instantly, with nice and flattering words, as they told him. The van Arteveldes, however, had been opposers of the counts and the aldermen of the old lineages.

Heinric had met lately a young man with whom he had developed good relations, Philip van Artevelde, a son of James van Artevelde. He had felt drawn to that man, who displayed a strange charisma and appeal to him. He thought Philip resembled him in many aspects. Philip van Artevelde and Heinric Vresele could now be seen to walk together in Ghent on the quays of the Leie or the Scheldt, enjoying their company. Philip van Artevelde had first studied in England, for his mother had wanted him to become a monk and priest. Philip therefore had some erudition and could talk enthusiastically of England, but not of his studies. Philip refused to talk about his life in the English monasteries and schools, so Heinric thought Philip had not enjoyed his stay there, or might have suffered bad experiences during this education. Philip had convinced his mother only recently he was not cut to become a priest and a monk, so he had been allowed to return to Ghent and become a weaver-trader, like his father had been. Philip was twenty-six years old, and promised to be Heinric's best friend. Philip had no other friends, it seemed, than Heinric! Philip being a trader from the weaver's guild, and having received no military training, had no inkling to join the militia on this campaign and had he wanted to, he would not have been allowed to march. Many influential men of Ghent considered Philip van Artevelde with suspicions. They avoided him and Heinric, as they did with the other members of the once so famous van Artevelde family.

\*\*\*\*\*

When it became clear to the warlords of Count Louis of Male that the militias and knights of Brabant would defend their duchy in front of the walls of Brussels, the Flemish troops positioned their dense formations close to the city, in the plains of Scheut, in the most simple and most traditional way. They placed a right wing, a centre and a left wing in view of Brussels.

The army of Flanders was now made up for the very largest part by the militiamen of the cities, and these had marched on foot. A few hundred knights and men-at-arms on horseback had accompanied the hordes of the guilds, but these did not constitute a solid group, working as one unit. The riders had been dispersed among the army.

The army of Brabant stood in similar order, but they had gathered a larger group of heavily armoured knights on horseback, which stood concentrated on the left wing. Geert von Jülich, count of Berg commanded this left wing, and he had also brought a large contingent of

German men-at-arms on foot with him. Many knights of Brabant stood here, so that the *Brabanders* considered their left wing the hammer that should destroy the Flemish right wing first, and then surround the centre and left in a pincher movement. The aldermen of Brussels stood in the centre, with duke Wenceslas when he arrived, and here also waited the standard-bearer of Brabant, the lord of Asse. He deployed the large and proud flag of Brabant, a black standard with a rampant yellow lion with red claws. On the other side, the standard of Flanders showed the same lion, but a black lion on a yellow background. The two lions were ready to devour each other.

The Brabanders were well aware the foreign Duke Wenceslas was with them, but they had no love for this lord. Their true duchess, Joanna of Brabant, still resided in the *Coudenberg* palace of Brussels, and it was her the battles of Brabant had come to protect. On the Brabant right wing stood the militiamen of Leuven.

In Flanders' centre stood the militiamen of Ghent with Heinric Vresele and his group, commanded by the lord of Gistel. On the right wing, facing the dreaded left wing of the enemy, stood the rest of the militia of Ghent, facing the count of Berg. In each of the Flemish phalanxes stood five thousand men. The men of Brabant numbered a third less militiamen, but they could bring far more horse-riders and knights on the battlefield, partly due to the troops that had accompanied the count of Berg. The men of Brabant were confident they fought for a just cause and could make up for the fact they had less warriors in the field by their energy and courage.

Heinric Vresele stood in the first rows of the centre of the army of Flanders, waiting for the battle. His heart beat ferociously, for he was scared, and even more scared of showing his fear. Wouter de Smet and Clais de Hert stood behind him, in the second row. The men had been waiting in the field of Scheut for a few hours already. Most of Heinric's militiamen stood half-drunk, half crazed with expectation and fear. Ale had asked for more ale, but now, the jars were empty and the throats as dry as ever. The men were nervous. The drums of the march had stopped beating, the pipes did not give their shrill tones. The men waited in some chaos of rows. They talked, launched jokes at one another, knelt and played at cards or at dice. Their voices filled the air with a humming sound like of an excited beehive.

Suddenly, some movement could be detected on the other side, in the army of Brabant. Knights in vivid colours rode in front of the troops, commands could be heard being shouted and repeated, and the rows of the *Brabanders* straightened. War cries could be heard, 'Brussels!', 'Leuven!', 'Brabant!', and the drums and trumpets announced the beginning of the battle.

The lord of Gistel ordered the Flemish battalions into position. Rows were formed again, the talking groups broke up, silence fell. The men joined their comrades in straight lines, as they had been brought in the field. The Flemish drums and pipes began to sound the preparation for the assault. The men stood up from the ground, stretched their backs and their limbs. *Goedendags* were stuck firmly in the earth, but still kept vertical. The priests present in the rows began to chant psalms and they blessed the men with the sign of the cross. The Flemish warriors wondered whether they would have to run and attack first, or suffer the assault and shock of the oncoming enemy. Heinric Vresele cursed. He was not much of a warrior, he knew, he had not trained often. Any man with a *goedendag* could thrust and hit, he thought, and what more was needed? The Flemish and the *Brabanders* stood in front of each other, hundreds of flags unfurled above the armies now, flapping in the wind as so many colourful butterflies, but forming a threatening mass of colours on both sides. It would be a hot day in

this mid-August. New commands were heard in the battles of Brabant, and the three wings of Brabant began to move forward. The fight for Brabant was to start.

Crossbowmen ran in front. They planted their pavises nearer the Flemish lines, whereupon bolts whizzed through the sky, flew in a high arc above the Flemish hordes, rose, and then descended gathering speed and momentum, into the Flemish rows. Many bolts and arrows struck merely the soft earth, but some bit into warriors. The men wounded and killed were the first unlucky ones of the day. Flemish crossbowmen advanced too, and began to release arrows on the enemy archers. The phalanxes of Brabant had stopped their forward move by then. This first confrontation of archers only lasted for a few moments, until the war lords on both sides estimated no decision could be reached using a few archers only. Brabant first withdrew its crossbows, then Flanders. The archers remained in the first rows, however. Once more, the men of Brabant advanced a few steps. The Flemish militiamen were ordered a few steps forward. The wings stood now so close to each other, insults could be heard launched from both sides. The drummers beat more frantically, the trumpets and the pipes sounded. The men hit their shields with their weapons and shouted, ‘Flanders the Lion!’ on the Flemish side and ‘Brabant!’ on the other.

Suddenly, the mass of knights on horseback of the Brabant left wing cantered forward, then galloped, lances crouched horizontal. The surprise attack of the left wing only, reached in less than a few moments the Flemish lines with full impact. Geert van Gulik had wanted to force the battle and launch a decisive attack with his heavy cavalry. On Flemish side, at the last moment, orders were shouted, so that the Flemish right wing transformed rapidly into a long porcupine. The first row of militiamen crouched, knee on the ground. They brought their *goedendags* low and just a little oblique, pushed into the ground at the other end, all steel points forward, shafts behind their shields. The second row stepped a little forward, and these men brought their *goedendags* and spears higher in the air, less obliquely, ends still firm in the earth. These *goedendags* stuck near the heads of the first row of men. The third row added its points right behind, again more horizontally. The men of the fourth row grabbed their weapons firmly in both hands, ready to stab at riders that would have broken through the first three rows. The Flemish stood ten rows deep, waiting for the onslaught of the Brabant riders. The men in the first row now cursed, reflecting they should have chosen to stand in the rear rows.

The knights of Brabant, riding on destriers, heavily armoured in gleaming steel, helmets and visors closed to mere slits, clashed with tremendous force into the Flemish lines. The noise of this first attack was terrible to be heard in both armies. The stamps of the thousands of feet and horse hoofs, the jangle of the chain mails, the thudding of the drums and the clamour of the trumpets mingled with the clashes of steel on steel and with the shouts and curses of the thousands of fighting men. Above the noise of the weapons and shields, rose the pitiful whinnying of the horses that impaled themselves on the points of the Flemish *goedendags*. One could discern also the hopeless cries of Flemish militiamen, excellent artisans of Ghent, who were being trampled under the hooves of the powerful Brabant war horses, the shouts of pain of men being transpierced by lances, the clanking of the hooves on shields, the war cries and the curses of the men, and then also the noise of metal on metal, the thumps of the battle-axes, and the slashes of the swords and maces on shields. The first two ranks of Flemish militiamen were smashed to the ground!

The Brabant knights had thought to crush entirely the Flemish left wing, and to break through the lines. The first three rows of the Flemish right wing were indeed smashed under the

hooves and under the weight of horses, but in this tangled mass, in this chaos of falling horses, men crushed to death, and shattered shields, the Brabant knights who charged still, were brought to a stop by a porcupine of hundreds of blades of *goedendags* that rose in their path instead of opening. Many a Brabant knight flew over the neck of his falling horse onto the sharpened points of the *goedendags*, to be instantly killed by the heavy weight of the knob behind the points. Fallen horses obstructed the path of horses that followed, more horses failed and fell to knees or sideways. More spears struck in horses' sides. Many maces crushed Flemish skulls, but the main effect was that the massive, energetic assault of the Brabant knights, was absorbed into the Flemish rows and stopped. The horse riders then fought the men who rose from the earth left and right of them, crushed skulls with maces left and right, and drew their long swords to whirl around them and make space in a bloody path. The knights indeed succeeded in hacking free paths in front of them, so they advanced still, but extremely slowly. The Flemish ranks opened where the fiercest of the Brabant knights slashed out with superhuman energy. Commands and encouragements were then heard on the Flemish side, and intrepid militiamen surged forward in flocks to meet what could not be stopped. The Brabant knights could not be halted by two or three Flemish warriors clad only in mail, so ten Flemish militiamen sprang forward to meet each knight. They cut with swords into the bellies and hearts of horses, slashed into knights' legs, grabbed at stirrups and reins, stuck spears tens of inches in horses' necks, and eager hands drew from the right on knights who hacked to the other side.

The Flemish ranks of the right wing had retreated several steps backwards, but the last rows were not yet fighting. The Flemish rows had simply plied back against the back rows, the wing had become more dense, the battle now raged in one long line, but the Flemish wing did not flee and did not break. The Flemish right wing was a chaos of fighting, of sweating, bleeding, cursing and shouting men. It became clear the decision of the battle would be fought there. The massacre was almost only fought and perpetrated on this side, to the astonished eyes of the other, waiting warriors in the centre and the farther wing. They stood for long moments as frozen by horror.

In the two other wings of the Flemish and Brabant armies, the men looked at each other and at the carnage on the side of their wings with consternation and dismay, wondering what to do next. The Brabant warriors shouted victory, but the Flemish militiamen of the centre saw the ranks of their friends being shattered and pushed back. They could not let this happen! White faced for revenge and anger, the leaders in the front rows of the Flemish centre, foremost Heinric Vresele, shouted their challenge, then. Yes, the Flemish right wing had retreated, ten paces maybe, the battle lines there had been compressed, but the last rows remained firm, held their place, and no Brabant knight emerged from behind the Flemish lines. Revenge had to be sought, the centre should attack!

A roar of wild and blind anger rose from the thousands of Flemish throats of the centre, and the militiamen around Heinric Vresele, the men of the Ghent guilds, surged forward in attack, followed by the men on their left wing. The Flemish commanders were baffled by this spontaneous movement of their men, but they did not stop and could not stop the sudden fury, but used it and encouraged it. They too ran or rode in the mass of their men, calling 'Flanders the Lion!' and 'Kill the traitors, the *Brabanders!*' as loudly as they could. The Flemish knights on horseback dropped their lances, drew their long and heavy swords, and circled them in the air as so many rallying signs. Forward! Kill the bastards! The fury had to be fuelled, the rage augmented!

The Brabant militiamen and knights of the centre and of their right wing had not expected this sudden development. They had thought they, and not the Flemish, would soon advance and attack, as their left wing had done. When the Flemish burst onto them, they hesitated what to do, and were not very well prepared. They now brought their shields to their breasts, but did not form barriers of steel until their leaders gained their senses at the very last moment, and shouted that order. There followed some confusion in the Brabant lines, and then the first Flemish militiamen sprang against their front rows. While spears did come up on the Brabant side, the Flemish warriors crashed into the *Brabanders*. They had the scent of battle victory in their nostrils.

Heinric Vresele ran in the first Flemish lines like a Greek hoplite in the Peloponnesian wars, shield tugged against his breast, *goedendag* held horizontal. He pushed away the spear that should have been thrust in his chest, ducked under another steel point that threatened from the side, and slammed his weapon forcefully into the belly of an opponent, right under the man's breastplate. He had never been taught to aim for this softer place, he pushed there instinctively. Heinric had wondered whether his *goedendag* could pierce through mail, and found the answer here, for the steel blade of his weapon entered the full fifteen inches into the man, as if he cut into butter. He had to force a little when the point hit the chain, but then it cut on and stopped only when the weight propped into the man's flesh. The chain mails had been broken. Red blood gulped up around the blade, and burst out when Heinric turned his weapon half a circle and drew it back. Heinric enjoyed merely a glimpse of the first man he had thus ever killed, a young and handsome Brabant warrior with almost blond hair, a wisp of a fair beard on his chin, blue eyes, but he let go of a triumphant shout of joy as he saw the youth fall to the ground, and stepped forward again. He found he enjoyed killing! Wouter de Smet had already thrown his shield against another spear that struck at Heinric. Wouter jumped up over the grasshopper, almost fell, and stabbed in his turn with the *goedendag* he held in both hands. Clais de Hert was hindered by Heinric in front of him, but Flemish militiamen pushed him forward and he stumbled against a *Brabander*, who he stabbed in the side.

Heinric fell against a Brabant shield, forced that back, and in the next few moments, the Flemish assault simply plied the Brabant ranks backwards, threw shield to shield, killed or wounded with spears, stabbed and thrust. When the pressure of this fierce Flemish counter-attack was stopped, the Brabant phalanxes had been squeezed together, rammed backwards, and the enemy stood five paces closer to the walls of Brussels. The warriors then fought, teeth grinding, lips tight, eye in eye, hearts tight, and the first men in each rank tied to move arms holding weapons, which was almost impossible, so little space was left as shield was crushed against shield and breast thrust against spine.

Heinric managed to liberate the hand that held his *goedendag*. He moved his body slightly sideways, got a little free space, only the leeway he needed to strike with his *goedendag* against a helmet. The man in front of him was thrown aside, and the Wouter de Smet, who had been shoving a *Brabander* aside next to Heinric, stabbed the man in his side. The Brabant warrior fell. Heinric pushed him further down with his shield, and he stepped on, engaging another militiaman of Brabant. Wouter fought now next to him, Heinric's companion in the first row having been wounded. Clais de Hert had thrown off his *goedendag* into the face of a *Brabander*, had drawn his sword, and fought with this handier weapon in close combat. Clais had the right reaction, thought Heinric, for a sword was easier to handle in such a fight, but he did not release his *goedendag*. He was not quick enough, he considered rightly, with a sword. He imposed on himself to continue the battle with the few movements he knew well with the simpler weapon, to stab and to slam down, even though he grew tired in his arm. He would

soon have to use a lighter weapon, he reckoned nevertheless, for the heavier *goedendag* was exhausting him rapidly.

Heinric fought on, parrying spears with his shield, stabbing from under another enemy shield, avoiding spear thrusts, pushing into soft flesh, using his legs and boots to hurt, thrusting his lethal point very powerfully. He heard with relish the screams from hoarse throats when he wounded, adding ever momentum to his *goedendag*. This was joyous work, and he felt he was good at it! He enjoyed the way he could thrust forward, turn and draw, hit shields and thrust again. Yes, he was actually enjoying himself in this close-contact battle, and he suddenly knew he could not be hurt. He was invincible, the hero of antiquity, the avenging angel. Eye to eye combat was what he liked.

Wouter and Clais advanced slightly behind Heinric now, astonished at how easily their leader, ever under-estimated, cut through the enemy lines. They protected him left and right, and let him hack a path. Heinric did not look at what was happening beyond and at his sides. He advanced as if in a dream, hacked and slashed, evaded spear points and slammed his shield. He felt as if his will to conquer was much stronger than the will of his opponents to resist, so that those men lost the energy to fight him off. This was the magic of battle, the irresistible elation of Heinric!

He fought doggedly on, concentrating with a strange determination only on the men who stood in front of him. He had already killed four men, wounded twice, but he too had suffered two wounds, one on his left leg and one in his side. Especially this last wound hurt, and part of his mail hung sliced through as if cut by a very sharp knife along his hips, but he bit through the pain and continued to satisfy his wild rage. He did not notice, advancing slowly but methodically, how on his left and right the fury of the Flemish militiamen's onslaught had cut even deeper into the Brabant enemy troops. The lord of Gistel, who had discarded his horse, and a large group of dismounted noble knights of Flanders followed Heinric's bloody path, the yellow standard of Flanders penetrating golden into Brabant. The *Gentenaars* hacked a bloody wedge so far in the centre for the knights, who finished opening the breach into the Brabant centre, unstoppable, wild, fierce, savage, massacring the men of Brabant in front of them. They now threatened the group around the standard-bearer of Brabant, the protectors of the lord of Asse.

At that moment, only minutes after the Brabant cavalry attack, the impetuous assault of the Brabant knights around Geert van Gulik, followed by the German mercenaries, had been stopped in a carnage. Tens of knights lay dead on the battlefield among killed or wounded horses still kicking with their hooves while lying on the ground, soaked in warm blood. Tens of knights lay dead on the battlefield. The air over the battlefield reeked foully of sweet, dried blood, of excrements and of vomit. Horses without riders, large gaping wounds in their bodies, galloped aimlessly behind the lines. Flaming red devils flew satisfied over the field of Scheut, asking for more dark souls to be harvested! On this left, the Brabant militiamen of Brussels had stepped forward too, so they now engaged their Flemish enemies together with the knights of the duchy, but the massive assault had not broken the fighting spirit of the Flemings, and the realisation of that fact had encouraged the Flemish and discouraged the *Brabanders*. The *Gentenaars* counter-attacked in groups at the sides, having more warriors than Brabant, and they threatened to overwhelm the Brabant militiamen from the sides.

In the centre, the battle raged on with unheard-of rage and the *Brabanders* could not resist. The Flemish militiamen had slammed into them with impetuous ferocity. Brabant retreated. Large gaps were torn into their block, the Flemish knights on horseback rode into these

openings and widened them with the force of their maces, threatening isolated groups of Brabant militiamen with annihilation.

Similar battles were going on against the right wing of Brabant. The *Brabanders* did not resist the energy and blind rage of the militiamen from Bruges and Ieper. A Flemish commander gave orders to encircle the Brabant militiamen of Leuven, attacking the enemy not only in front but also on the sides, surrounding the enemy with more men than Brabant could oppose to the surrounding Flemish enemy.

Geert van Gulik had wanted and hoped to smash the Flemish right wing with his armoured knights, but his charge was being spent entirely in the sponge of the obstinate hordes of Ghent militiamen. Ghent had bent, been pushed together, but had not been broken, and was now thrusting back with unstoppable ardour!

The Battle of Scheut raged in this way, in full horror, for a few hours. The real and sudden turning point came a little later, in front of Heinric Vresele, in the centre of the battle. The lord of Asse, who held the black standard of Brabant with the yellow lion of the red claws, saw the Flemish knights advance dangerously to him. The formation of Brabant militiamen in front of him crumbled, and he detected men who did not wear the stalks of corn in their belt that distinguished the warriors of Brabant from those of Flanders to very near him, even to his left and right. He saw long lanes of warriors advancing to him from the other side, enemies who had pierced through the Brabant lines, reaching ever farther, even to the back of where he stood.

A sudden uncontrollable fear gripped his heart. Asse was a brave man, or so he thought of himself, but he had never before fought in such a carnage as he saw here before, and certainly not in one that was delivered with such fury so close to him. The panic of fear overwhelmed his senses and his mind, killed all other feelings of honour, courage, will to resist, of determination to stand with the standard of Brabant he should have protected to the end. In a horrible movement, he threw down the standard that hindered his movements, and to the astonishment of the knights who fought on his side, he turned his horse, and spurred it away from the Flemish who surged forward.

The lord of Asse would not be found dead, defeated, enrolled in his beloved standard on the battlefield of Scheut! His horse pranced, slashed out with its hooves at Brabant warriors who stood in his way, and he darted backwards. Men from Brussels were thrown aside. The knights who stood with the lord of Asse, some of which were already parrying spear thrusts of the Flemish enemy, hesitated, and then also turned their horses, and fled. The Brabant militiamen of the centre saw the standard of their army being discarded, lying in the dust, and being trampled upon by the first Flemish warriors. They saw the knights of Brabant, their commanders, flee at full speed of their animals towards the walls of Brussel, so they surmised the Brabant army retreated. The Brabant ranks began to waver. The *Brabanders* turned and fled, offered their backs to the Flemish, and ran, following the knights.

The pressure ceased very suddenly in front of the Flemish militiamen of the centre. Heinric Vresele, Wouter de Smet and Clais de Hert stood only a few moments, very tired in arms and legs, astonished at seeing the men who had so tenaciously fought them only heartbeats ago, now running backwards. Wouter de Smet recuperated the standard of Brabant, but Heinric understood immediately this flag should not be raised again. He rolled the cloth up around the shaft and used it as a spear. He would later present it to his commander, the lord of Gistel. Wouter de Smet and Clais de Hert cheered at the latest development, holding their weapons and shields high, shouting their triumph. They remarked how everywhere in the centre and at their left wing, hundreds and then thousands of Brabant militiamen turned their backs to the battle in chaos, and fled. The day was won for Flanders! Brabant leaders shouted commands

to pursue the battle, but to no avail. Brabant fled! The Flemish then also saw the left wing of Brabant waver, and more and more warriors in the rear fled. In the last ranks of Brabant at that side, militiamen began to run to the south, away from the massacre.

Heinric Vresele could not just remain immobile in the field of Scheut. His lust for blood and revenge was not entirely satisfied. He had been transformed into a man who dared to do all! He cried, ‘on, on, Flanders the lion! In pursuit! We must crush the traitors!’ Heinric surged forward once more, grabbing the *goedendag* with both of his hands and throwing away his shield. Wouter and Clais wondered for a heartbeat what insane fury had driven Heinric on, but then they and all the Flemish troops of their battalion ran after the militia of Brussels.

The Brabant knights of Brussels already reached the *Gruyskens* Gate, and rode into the city. The gate remained open to let through the warriors on foot of Brabant, but many Flemish warriors ran immediately behind the *Brabanders*, and entered the gate among the militiamen of Brussels. In a few moments’ time, hundreds of men of the Flemish centre rushed through this gate, where terrible fights continued. The Flemish hordes had run into the city of Brussels!

In the Brussels palace of the dukes of Brabant, Joanna of Brabant had heard of the pending defeat of the troops of her husband Wenceslas. A bloodied messenger had ridden from behind the lord of Asse to warn her. He urged her to flee the city. Joanna was dressed for the ride. She ran with her guards to the stables of her palace, jumped on a saddled horse that had been prepared for this eventuality, and with her escort, she escaped by the other side of the town, riding in the direction of Leuven, then deviating to the south, hoping her husband, Wenceslas of Luxemburg had likewise been able to escape the disaster.

Wenceslas rode to the rear of the left wing of Brabant. The knights of van Gulik noticed the flight of the Brabant militia on their two other wings, and they saw groups of militiamen of their own wing run southwards. The knights on horseback then also broke off the battle and they spurred their horses equally to Brussels, to the open gates, for they knew to their left lay the river Senne. Many warriors of Brabant, however, continued to run to the south, unaware they would be blocked by the river and the moat of the walls of the city. They fled, but were soon obstructed by the waterway. They were being pursued by the Flemish troops, who near the Senne pushed them on, thinking the *Brabanders* had stopped to offer resistance in a last stand here. The Brabant militiamen were shoved into the water! The slopes of the river were strewn with dead and wounded men. Tens of Brabant militiamen sprang in the water, realising too late there was no escape out of the deep river when one was dressed in chain mail. They drowned.

The Flemish militiamen of Ghent then took a dreadful revenge on the *Brabanders* who had so powerfully attacked them hours ago and who had killed so many of their friends and colleagues in the guilds. They killed indiscriminately, whether the Brabant warriors surrendered or not. They gave no quarter at this side of the battle, allowed no *Brabander* to escape, and pushed into the water every *Brabander* they could find. The massacre at this side of the fields of Scheut was the most pitiless and ferocious of the day. Later, the *Brabanders* would call the Battle of Scheut their *Slechte Goensdag*, their Bad Wednesday.

While the Brabant militiamen died in the Senne, or were butchered in the fields of Scheut by the vengeful Flemish militias, Heinric Vresele and his men were running to the *Steenweg*, the

main road of Brussels. Most of the victors had, however, entered Brussels by Saint Catherine's gate. They passed the rest of the evening and of the night in that neighbourhood in which was situated part of the port of the town, outside the main walls of the centre. The Flemish pillaged and then burnt Saint Catherine's quarter. The fire flames mounted so high they passed the inner walls of Brussels and set fire to the first houses of the city. The Flemish continued to run into the very centre of Brussels. In the night, Heinric's men ran to Brussels' market place, where already the yellow banner with the black lion of Flanders, the banner of Count Louis of Male, hung on the town hall.

Brussels, Brabant's capital, had been captured by the triumphant army of Flanders. The total capture of Brussels lasted until the next morning, when the aldermen formally surrendered.

It had been explicitly forbidden to pillage the town and to kill the inhabitants, yet many Flemish warriors gained small fortunes from what they could extort in the night from the wealthy poorters of the town. So did Heinric Vresele, Wouter de Smet and Clais de Hert. Heinric brought them to some of the wealthier, larger *stenen* of the town, which they left intact, did not disturb, but they stuffed in their deep pockets heavy purses of gold and silver coins, and loaded their backpacks with jewels and exquisite golden items, statues and smaller candelabras in the same precious metals. They did not take the larger objects they could not hide. They scavenged for more precious objects all through the night.

A few hours later, the Flemish army gathered outside Brussels and set itself on the march to Leuven. Little resistance was offered there, as well as in the next days the lesser towns of Brabant.

The port of Antwerp was besieged by the count's fleet, and surrendered rapidly. Louis's fleet consisted of eight large cogs and four smaller vessels, requisitioned from the Hanse of Bruges.

The four armies of Flanders and her allies conquered Brabant entirely within a week. Count Louis of Male could ride into Brussels, visit the palace of the dukes on the *Coudenberg*. He took on the title of duke of Brabant, but he did not reside in the castle.

On the eighteenth of August, Brussels was definitively in the hands of the Flemish army. Wenceslas of Luxemburg, the counts of Looz and Berg, and the knights who had by their speed survived the Battle of Scheut, rode to Leuven, where the aldermen told the unpopular duke to leave the town immediately, for they would accept Louis of Male. Wenceslas fled to Diest.

On the twentieth of August, Count Louis of Male could take residence in Mechelen, a town he thought he could claim his, and the aldermen of Mechelen having accepted him as their lord. He imposed his conditions on Antwerp. By the twenty-fourth of August, practically all the towns of Brabant had accepted the authority of Flanders.

The army of the count of Namur, of count William of Namur, had occupied Nivelles and Geldenaken. The town of Gembloux was pillaged and burnt.

Englebort de la Marck, the bishop of Liège, finally sent only a token force into Brabant led by his Marshal Lambert de Huppaye and by the bailiff of the Hesbaye region, James le Chabot. The town of Hannut was taken.

Brabant subdued to him, Count Louis of Male proceeded to appoint new mayors and aldermen in the main cities of Brabant: Wouter Keynoghe in Leuven, John van Wilre in Tienen, Pieter van Hoboken in Antwerp, and Siger van Hertvelde was appointed amman of Antwerp.

By that time, the gross of the militiamen of Flanders had already returned to Flanders. Heinric, Wouter and Clais, had marched back to Ghent, where they arrived on the twenty-fifth of August. Count Louis of Male also returned to Male, but he called the nobles of Brabant together for a meeting at Kortenberg on the first of September, in the morning. Other meetings with the count and aldermen of the cities took place in the next days. The nobles of Brabant swore an oath of allegiance to Louis of Male as duke of Brabant.

Joanna of Brabant found refuge at Binche in the county of Hainault, Wenceslas fled to Aachen and finally, he rode to Sulzbach in Germany, to confer with his brother, Emperor Charles IV. Duchess Joanna, after the largest part of the Flemish army had returned to their cities, rode with her court to Baarle-Hertog, where she continued to claim she was the only rightful heir to Brabant.

On the nineteenth of September, merely a month after the major Battle of Scheut, another great battle took place near Poitiers in France, a battle in which the French army was once more defeated by the English. The small army of the prince of Wales, Edward, son of King Edward III, had decisively broken the army of France, and John II, king of France, was taken a prisoner. Remarkably, the armies that clashed at Poitiers were not bigger than the armies that had stood in front of each other at Scheut!

Count Louis of Male, peer of France, the victor of Scheut, was called to Paris, to the Royal Council of France, now led by the dauphin, leaving his wife Margaret of Brabant in charge of his newly conquered duchy.

\*\*\*\*\*

The developments in France in the war with England had indeed found a tragic and entirely unexpected dénouement. By mid-September, Edward, the prince of Wales, had reached Montbazou, south of Tours with his small army, hoping to join his father's main troops. Two cardinals sent by the pope, among which the haughty Cardinal Talleyrand of the Périgord region, still tried to make peace, but the negotiations were refused.

On Sunday, the eighteenth of September of 1356, the two armies of France and England stood in front of each other near the village of Maupertuis, seven miles southeast of Poitiers. King John II of France led his army and amidst the nobles rode his four sons. Charles, the heir and dauphin, was nineteen years old. Louis, the duke of Anjou, was seventeen. John, the future duke of Berry was sixteen, and Philip, the future duke of Burgundy, was fourteen. King John II placed fourteen thousand men to confront the six thousand men-at arms and the one thousand archers of the prince of Wales.

Once more, lessons not learned of previous battles in France, the English archers won the day. The French knights assaulted the rows of the English led by the earls of Warwick, Suffolk, Oxford and Salisbury in wave after wave, until the French, terraced by arrows, had no courage left to attack.

When the English seemed to be suffering and were expected to lose the battle, Edward allowed Sir John de Grailly, the Gascon Captal de Buch, to attack with a few men on horseback at the rear of the French army. Panic was sowed, and the French fled.

The knight Geoffrey de Charny who held the Oriflamme, was killed. More than two thousand knights and barons of France were made prisoner, which would allow for huge ransoms to make the English earls very rich. The greatest prize, however, was King John II himself, who

was found hiding under a bridge in the neighbourhood. Nearly two thousand five hundred French knights and men-at-arms had been killed, mostly by arrows.

In October of 1356, the Estates General of France met with the Dauphin Charles. The young prince could exert little authority over the members of the estates. The estates blamed the defeat of Poitiers not so much on the king as on the royal councillors. Most outspoken of the opposers to the royal government was the provost of Paris, the man who held a function similar to that of the First Alderman of the *Keure* in Ghent or to the mayors of other cities in the Low Countries. The provost was one of the richest men of Paris, a draper, a cloth merchant. His name was Etienne Marcel.

Marcel, in the absence of King John II, dared to speak out his mistrust of how the kingdom had been ruled by the nobles of the royal court. The Estates General forced a number of drastic measures on the dauphin. It voted for a standing committee of eighty members out of the large number of eight hundred men, representative of the nobility, the clergy and the bourgeoisie. Seven of the most notoriously bad royal councillors were to be dismissed, and the Royal Council was to be replaced by a council of twenty-eight men, of which only twelve would be noblemen, four from the clergy and twelve others from the bourgeoisie. Etienne Marcel also forced Charles of Navarre to be released from prison. The provost hoped a free Charles de Navarre would remain an annoyance to the dauphin Charles, weakening further on royal power.

The Dauphin Charles, only nineteen years old, was very intelligent and cunning. He looked sickly, pale and thin as he sat on the throne at the meeting of the Estates General, when he had to hear to the end the ordinances of Etienne Marcel. He did not move his thin lips, long nose, long limbs that made him seem a malformed, weak, young boy of no substance. His tiny, sharp eyes, almost hidden under bushy eyebrows, took in who spoke in the most outrageous terms against the policies of his father. Like the young Count Louis of Male ten years earlier, he steeled his determination. He had a strong awareness of his future royal function and duties. He could do little at the time to resist the allegations of Etienne Marcel, but he would bide his time and try, like Louis of Male, to grow in strength and in support. He needed a new army first, and the funds from the Estates General might offer him to resist England. He only reacted when he heard in the meeting repeated the accusation he might not be a Valois, his mother having had him by a lover of hers. Charles noticed coldly how Etienne Marcel conspired with Robert le Cocq, the bishop of Laôn, in favour of Charles de Navarre. Le Cocq wanted to become the chancellor of the kingdom, for with that function came the greatest power and much wealth. Le Cocq surmised he could receive this function from Charles de Navarre as king of France.

When Etienne Marcel and the Estates General presented the resolutions to the Dauphin Charles, Charles calmly rejected the ordinances of the Estates and left the hall in the wild chaos of protests that erupted. He rode out of the city of Paris, expecting uprisings against his rule in the largest city of the kingdom, in his capital. Charles had no idea how he might resist Etienne Marcel in Paris, fight Charles de Navarre to secure his future crown, how and from whom to obtain the money to continue fighting the English armies, but he never once thought of considering giving up resistance as an option. Resisting was his duty to preserve the throne of France for his family. He had no money and not the power of an army. Yet, he should and would strike back!

## Chapter 5. The troubled Times. Spring 1357 – Winter 1370

### Flanders and France

In August of 1356, Count Louis of Male completely conquered Brabant. The help he received from Count William of Namur and from Englebert de la Marck, bishop of Liège, had only marginal importance in the War of Succession, but it had prevented these leaders to support Brabant. Louis of Male disbanded his army when the Brabant cities recognised him as duke of Brabant. He had to do so, for the gross of his troops consisted of the militias of the cities of Flanders, and these men could be kept in the field only a short time without damaging the economies of the towns. The militia formed an army of conquest, not one of occupation. After a month of campaigning, the men from the guilds were eager to return to their crafts. Louis kept garrisons of his own, paid troops, in the main cities of Brabant. He therefore did not really control the lords of the countryside, the lords of the castellanies. Louis of Male had to bind these men to his person also, so he called them together at a meeting to be held on the first of September of 1356 at Kortenbergh. Similar conferences would be held at Leuven on the fourth of September, and at Vilvoorde on the seventeenth of that month. Only about two hundred of the three thousand vassals of Brabant participated in these sessions and swore an oath to serve Louis of Male as their duke. Some of the knights excused themselves, declared they were ill or recuperating from the wounds inflicted to them at Scheut, but the large majority simply did not turn up and offered no excuse at all. Louis of Male was very angry by this lack of respect. He confiscated the possessions of some of the recalcitrant barons, but realised he would have to do a lot more to link the lords to his person. He soon learnt he war for Brabant was not over yet.

At the beginning of October, Joanna of Brabant sent letters to the main cities of Brabant announcing she resided now at 's Hertogenbosch, or Bois-le-Duc as the town was called in French, a town in the far north of the duchy. In the letters, the duchess stated she would continue to regard herself as the duchess of Brabant. Emperor Charles IV would soon bring armed troops to assist his brother, her husband, to reconquer her rightful heritage. She began to gather troops from noblemen who remained loyal to her. Numerous lords of the castellanies promised her fidelity, and so did also the aldermen of Brussels and Leuven. Count Louis of Male would have needed to levy a new army to dislodge Joanna, but he didn't dare to challenge the emperor too much.

Count Louis of Male had to allow the bishop of Liège to exert not only religious authority over the eastern towns of Brabant, but also jurisdictional power. The cities, always eager to have their charters acknowledged and respected, resented this authority of Liège over the towns of the duchy of Brabant, especially in matters of justice. The cities also did not like much the haughtiness with which Louis of Male had replaced their leaders by men of his own choice. Revolt fomented slowly in Brabant.

During the rainy night of the twenty-fourth of October of 1356, a member of the old lineages of Brussels, a man called Everard 't Serclaes, profited from the fact Louis of Male had only left a small garrison to guard Brussels. With a few men, young hotheads like himself, he climbed over the walls of the city, and opened the gates to more than one thousand men-at-arms sent by Joanna of Brabant, Wenceslas of Luxemburg and the counts of Looz and Berg. The men ran and rode into the centre of Brussels, killed some of the Flemish officers, and

dispelled the Flemish garrison. The leaders of the garrison realised quickly they could not win from such a force of knights, so they left the city without losing many men, but the standard of Brabant could be hung again on the town hall of the capital.

A little later, on the twenty-ninth of October, Leuven too expelled its Flemish garrison with the help of these Brabant troops.

Louis of Male had invested the fortress of Affligem. Mechelen remained loyal to him, and his fleet under his admiral James Buuc still blockaded the Scheldt at Antwerp, so his frontier with Brabant was secured, even if only by six thousand men-at-arms paid by him. He did not have to fear an invasion in Flanders, but Brabant seemed lost to him very rapidly. Nevertheless, by his invasion and by the Battle of Scheut, he had demonstrated his military power. Many skirmishes then took place all along the frontier, and gradually, Joanna had Brabant again and firmly in her hands. The duchess also forced back the troops of the count of Namur, as well as the men-at-arms of Liège.

Skirmishes between men of Brabant and of Flanders lasted throughout the winter.

By the tenth of December 1356, Duke Wenceslas rode from Brussels to the town of Metz to confer with Emperor Charles IV. On the seventh of January of 1357, Wenceslas and his brother, the emperor, left Metz for Maastricht, where Joanna of Brabant joined them at the end of that month. Emperor Charles IV had in the meantime summoned and blamed the bishop of Liège, a prince of the empire, for the latter's participation in the conflict against Wenceslas, in a conflict between counties of the empire, and the emperor did the same with William of Namur. Charles IV could threaten the two barons with confiscation of the lands they held to him in feudal fief! The two lords appeared humbly before the emperor at Maastricht, and rapidly changed sides into an alliance with Brabant. Their knights would not anymore fight in Brabant. The representatives of the cities of Brabant also bent their knees to the emperor and to Wenceslas in Maastricht.

A charter was then signed by which Wenceslas was appointed by right governor of Brabant. Other clauses of the charter stated that if Joanna of Brabant would come to die without offspring, Wenceslas would inherit Brabant as duke. If Joanna would still have children, which seemed unlikely, for she had given birth to no children with Wenceslas since her marriage in 1352, these children would inherit the duchy and the title. If both Joanna and Wenceslas would die without offspring, Brabant would pass to the House of Luxemburg, to the king of Bohemia. Count Louis of Male of Flanders and the duke of Guelders were thus excluded from the succession of Brabant. This charter came to be called the Treaty of Maastricht. By the end of February of 1357, the aldermen of Brussels and Leuven ratified this convention.

On the twenty-ninth of March, Joanna of Brabant and Wenceslas could put a term to their intensive diplomatic efforts by persuading Count William III of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, to become their ally. Hainault also was part of the German empire! In return, William received the castellany of Heusden, which fitted nicely into his county. William and Joanna promised solemnly to rush to each other's aid with one thousand knights and eight thousand men-at-arms!

Louis of Male had thus most of the counties of the empire and of the Low Countries pitted against him in the War of the Succession of Brabant, but William of Hainault changed camps again in early May, promising to assist Louis by arbitrating in the conflict. William promised to aim for the cessation of Mechelen to Louis of Male, to secure for him the title of duke of

Brabant, to demand payments for the war effort of Louis, and to fix the rights of Margaret, as well as those of Joanna, in the heritage of Brabant from their father.

On the eighteenth of March of 1357, Count Louis of Male consented to a truce of three weeks to hold the negotiations between Brabant and Flanders. By the fourth of June, the negotiators agreed on the Peace of Ath in Hainault.

According to this treaty, Count Louis of Male received Mechelen by rights of his wife, Margaret of Brabant and as compensation for the expenses suffered in the war. Louis of Male acknowledged the rights of Joanna to the duchy, but in compensation for the promised dowry of the ten thousand Florins never paid, his wife Margaret received the town of Antwerp in fief of her sister. Louis of Male could govern Antwerp. Since Brussels, Leuven, Nivelles, Tienen and other Brabant towns had sworn allegiance to Louis of Male, he could still add the title of duke of Brabant to his other names, and the towns would have to send him each year two barons and four knights with twenty-five men-at-arms to serve him for six weeks, under their own banner. The fortified abbey of Affligem was handed over to its abbot by Louis of Male, but the abbey would not serve anymore as a fortress.

According to the Treaty of Ath, Mechelen and Antwerp came to be under Flemish control. Antwerp lost its staple rights to Flanders, and Louis of Male took control over the rivers Scheldt and Rupel, which had always been his secret aim. He laughed his head off to Heyla de Smet when he told her how he had tricked the dukes and the emperor, but Heyla suspected very much her Louis had been far more ambitious than he had wanted to show to her. Still, Louis seemed contented. The War of Succession had ended with Brabant yielding officially what Louis of Male always had wanted, Mechelen, Antwerp, and the control over the Scheldt.

Meanwhile, Count Louis worried about the growing unrest of the weavers in the cities, an issue he expected quite clearly, and about the dearth of grain in Flanders. In December of 1356, he allowed the weavers of Ghent to have the apprenticeship fee of the weavers benefit their hospice, the weavers' hall and their chapel. He granted a staple privilege on the import of grain via the Leie to Ghent, to limit the illegal export of grain. Ghent had already forbidden the authorisation to export grain without the authorisation of the aldermen. By ordinance of the count, the shippers of Douai could bring grain only as far as *Tussen Bruggen*, and there the grain had to be declared at the staple, and the shippers of Ghent only could transport the grain on. The shippers of Ghent were not allowed to enter Douai with their cargo. Statutes of Ghent added, forbade all export of grain and bread worth more than five grooten without the authorisation of the city aldermen. With these measures, Count Louis hoped to keep the *poorters* of Ghent quiet, at least for some time, but he knew well that what the weavers demanded at Ghent and at other cities of Flanders, was political power in the city councils. He felt not quite ready yet to grant so much.

\*\*\*\*\*

In France, in March of 1357, the meeting of the Estates General, as a result of the shock caused by the imprisonment of John II by the English, tried to force a Grand Ordinance of sixty-one clauses on the Dauphin Charles. The ordinance forbade the king to levy taxes without the consent of the Estates, and the currency could not be altered anymore without their consent. The dauphin received nevertheless the right to levy taxes for thirty-thousand men-at-arms, to be used in the war with England, but the expenditures of the crown had to be reduced. To advise the crown, a Grand Council was instituted, consisting of thirty-six men, twelve of the three Estates. The Estates General reserved for themselves the right to assemble

whenever they found a need to do so. Judicial cases in parliament had to be sped up, private wars between noblemen were forbidden, and many more such clauses had been added.

The dauphin signed this charter, but shortly later, King John II repudiated the signature of his son and heir. Also the noblemen and peers of France resented the ordinance.

In August of 1357, therefore, the Dauphin Charles began a long and arduous struggle with the Estates General, reinstating the former royal councillors. He informed the Grand Council he intended to govern alone, without their advice.

In the meantime, King Charles de Navarre was released from prison at Cambrai, to be used by Etienne Marcel as an alternative for the dauphin on the throne of France.

By April of 1357, France slipped into chaos. All the scourges of God were being let loose to devastate the country.

As the French and English armies had been disbanded, groups of mercenaries, sometimes grouped to bands of up to fifty armed men, roamed in the countryside. They terrorised the villages, as well as the lesser lords of the castellanies. These bands came to be called the Free Companies. They grew in numbers and wreaked havoc all over the country, especially in Picardy. The Dauphin Charles had no means to oppose them with.

In May of 1357, the prince of Wales sailed with his prisoner, King John II, from Bordeaux to Plymouth. John II was warmly welcomed in London. He received the Savoy Palace as lodging. This palace had been called after a count of Savoy who received the land from King Henry III in the thirteenth century. On that land stood a palace built in the same century by an earl of Leicester. It was situated between the City, the centre of London, and the royal palace of Westminster.

King Edward III had already forced the Treaty of Bordeaux on John II. By this treaty, Edward renounced to the throne of France, but he demanded and received full sovereignty over Aquitaine, the Poitou and Limousin regions, as well as over the Périgord and Quercy, Bigorre, Guare, the Agenais, and of course Ponthieu, Calais and Guines. Edward III had finally realised he would never gain the throne of France, but he set a high price on the end of the hostilities, and made John II of Valois pay very dearly by cutting large chunks of land out of the royal domains on the continent. Edward III sought to regain all the lands of the Plantagenets, and he kept in force the ransom of three million écus d'or for John II, nearly seven hundred thousand pounds.

In London, the negotiations continued, and in January of 1358 the Treaty of Bordeaux led to the first Treaty of London between the two kings. This treaty confirmed the clauses of the Treaty of Bordeaux, but the ransom was raised to four million écus d'or. Edward III promised once more to renounce his rights to the French throne, but in exchange for about one-third of the territories of the royal domains in France, far more than had been agreed at Bordeaux.

Meanwhile, the dauphin of France continued his ascent to power. In January of 1358, he entered Paris with a small number of guards. He began addressing the people of Paris with eloquence, winning them over to his cause. A royal faction developed in Paris. Etienne Marcel, alarmed by this development, gathered about three thousand Parisians at arms, erupted into the rooms of the dauphin and killed his two marshals. One other of the dauphin's councillors was killed in the streets. The mob now wore the red and blue coloured hoods of Paris. The dauphin merely said to the provost he still hoped the people of Paris might be friends with him.

In March of 1358, Charles sent his family in precaution to the town and fortress of Meaux, to safety, while he and his councillors rode out of Paris to nearby Senlis, leaving Etienne Marcel

once more in full power over Paris. The dauphin found new support with the lords of the countryside, however, for they felt disgusted and outraged by the acts of Etienne Marcel. Many noblemen rallied to the dauphin.

Yet another scourge afflicted France then, another revolt caused by an edict issued by the dauphin.

In order to contain what resembled a revolt in Paris, led by Etienne Marcel, the dauphin ordered his lords of the castellanies to fortify their castles around Paris and to bring more provisions into their strongholds, so that they would be able to withstand long sieges. Many of the lords seized the goods of the farms for this purpose! As a result, the peasants of Picardy, who had already suffered much from the English chevauchées and from the mercenary bandits of the Free Companies, revolted violently in May of 1358.

The revolt seemed to have started at the village of Saint-Leu near Senlis. During a meeting of smaller farmers there, the peasants complained about their misery, and they bitterly and justly blamed the lords. They assaulted the nearest castle, pillaged it, and killed its knight. Soon the revolt spread, and the peasants attacked in great numbers many other castles and manors. This resembled the revolt of the peasants in Flanders under Zannekin. They attacked in a large uprising in the region around Paris, in Picardy and in the Champagne. More than one hundred castles were sacked, the nobles and their families massacred. Monasteries and local priests were not spared.

Etienne Marcel noticed the uprisings, and thought in perfidy he could use the revolt for his own intrigues. He sought contact with the bands of peasants, urging them to make targets also of the estates of the royal councillors.

The name given to the revolt of the peasants was the *Jacquerie*. The name came from the nickname given to the common peasant, to the ever discontented, crude, greedy and insolent peasant, who was nicknamed Jacques Bonhomme. Most of the lords of France blamed Etienne Marcel for these uprisings of 1358.

The *Jacquerie* spread, grew in numbers and in atrocities committed, and brought individual groups together to form entire armies. One such army of about five thousand Jacques and a few hundred Parisians of Etienne Marcel attacked the city of Meaux, where the wife of the dauphin resided in the castle of Marché of Meaux, a fortified place. The dauphin's wife, Jeanne de Bourbon, had sought protection there, accompanied by her sister and many other ladies and their children of the royal court. The fortified castle of Marché was held only by a small garrison of royal guards, knights, for the armed protection of the royal family.

When the Jacques appeared before the walls of Meaux, the notables of the town, terrified by the numbers at their gates, the peasants brandishing billhooks, scythes, shovels and flails as arms, they opened the city gates to them, endangering the lives of the dauphin's wife and of her ladies-in-waiting.

Two leaders of the armies of France and England then combined their efforts. They were the Captal de Buch and the Gascon Gaston Phoebus de Foix. They decided to save the dauphin's wife, and attacked the Jacques with twenty-five knights and one hundred heavily armed men-at-arms. They joined other nobles who had decided to call a stop to the Jacques, with a force of about two thousand warriors. These leaders were the fiercest warriors of their times, enemies, but here they fought together. They massacred the badly armed peasants, killing several thousands of them. Later, they punished Meaux by hanging the mayor, pillaging and burning the town.

Everywhere in the country then, the nobles combined into regular army groups, and organised to oppose and suppress the *Jacquerie* revolt.

The suppression of the uprisings in the north, in Picardy, was led by King Charles de Navarre, who hoped to gain sympathy among the wealthy noblemen of that region. His army of heavily armoured knights on horseback massacred the peasants in large numbers. The nobles organised counter-attacks. By the end of June of 1358, the *Jacquerie* had virtually been stopped.

On the first of July of 1358, Etienne Marcel, the provost of the merchants of Paris, with the aldermen and the deans of the guilds of Paris, addressed a letter to the towns of Picardy and Flanders. They asked the towns to have understanding and sympathy for the justified cause of the largest city of the kingdom. They appealed for advice and aid because the cause of Paris, they said, was the same as what the towns of Flanders fought for, and they urged to revolt against the lords who wasted their lands, as they had done with the lands around Paris. They stressed the similarities of their causes. The letter remained without answer, for the cities of Flanders were now and again firmly in the hands of the noblemen of the old lineages, who were assimilated with the nobility of the county.

The letters came to be known by the men of the guilds, however, and many murmured the letter had been right. The men of the guilds began once more to discuss the issues of their class, and claiming their share in the government of the towns and of Flanders.

In Ghent, rumours ran more than two hundred thousand peasants had been killed in France during the suppression of the *Jacquerie*. With the plague, which continued to appear in certain places this year, the pillaging, raping and killing of isolated villages by the roaming mercenaries of the Free Companies, not to forget during the formidable raids of the English, and during the revolts of the Jacques peasants, were the fourth scourge to break the economy and the lives of the French-speaking people in the north. Grain deliveries to Ghent became disrupted, fields were left bracken, and famine threatened. Picardy, the grain fields of France and of Flanders, stood on fire!

Many people in our regions and in France then thought of the Revelation to John. The Lamb broke the first four seals in this text to reveal the riders of the Apocalypse. The riders rode on a white horse, on a bright red horse, on a black and on a pale horse. They were given authority over a quarter of the earth to kill by the sword – the war between France and England -, to kill by famine – the lands of Picardy lay fallow, abandoned and burnt -, by the plague, and through wild beasts – the Free companies and the *Jacquerie*. Was the Lamb breaking the seven seals, was the end of our quarter of the world near?

A new personage began to appear in the plays performed in the market places of the Flemish towns, staged by ambulant comedians: the avenging, frightful, evil-creating devil. Satan, Mephistopheles, Beelzebub and other such horrible creatures, had corrupted God's creation and scourged the earth. The benevolent, loving and protecting God had abandoned our sick, sinful continent. Death, the pale rider, swung its sickle to take lives by the thousands!

After the successes of King Charles de Navarre against the *Jacquerie*, he was chosen as captain of Paris, the military leader of the city, in the absence of the king and of the dauphin. Had he not saved Paris from being raped by the peasant hordes? The various factions in the largest town of the kingdom, however, confronted each other more and more openly, some being in favour of Etienne Marcel, other in favour of Charles de Navarre, and yet other for the Dauphin Charles.

By the summer of 1358, Etienne Marcel felt his influence beginning to wane, and his authority contested. The populace of Paris looked increasingly to the dauphin for stable,

peaceful government. The rest of the royal domains lay in chaos, but steadily, slowly, the Dauphin Charles kept doggedly on, trying to reorganise the noblemen around his court.

The city of Paris was closed for troops, as the government of the city feared pillage and massacres in the most populated area of the kingdom. At the end of July 1358, Etienne Marcel, fearing the growing influence of the dauphin, feeling an uprising against his authority would soon threaten him, wanted his ally, Charles de Navarre to enter the town with his troops to re-assert Marcel's dominance. The provost rode to the Gate of Saint-Denis and ordered the guards to hand over the keys of this important gate to knights of Charles de Navarre. The guards, being in favour of the dauphin and suspecting treason against the town, refused. Etienne Marcel tried the same command at the Gate of Saint-Anthony. The guards here reacted more violently, struck him down and killed him. Charles de Navarre, knowing a general revolt would follow, fled to the quarter of Saint-Denis outside Paris.

Although Charles would subsequently, in the month of August, defeat a small army of royal troops at Mauconseil, his rôle in France was finished. On the second of August, Paris opened its gates to the Dauphin Charles. The royalist faction had taken control of the city.

A little later, on the tenth of August, the dauphin proclaimed a general amnesty for the men who had opposed him, and also for the peasants of the *Jacquerie*. Peace had been restored in the royal domains. Most of the provisions of the Great Ordinance, set in place by the Estates General, could now be withdrawn by the dauphin. In the future, the dauphin or the king would call the Estates to convene in parliament when he felt he needed and wanted to. The Estates could not assemble at will.

In London, the negotiations between France and England continued, still with the aim to allow John II to return to Paris and to end the war. Edward III was weary of the fighting. A Second Treaty of London was agreed upon in March of 1359. King Edward III would receive Aquitaine, Normandy, Brittany, Maine, the regions of Tours and of Anjou, but the ransom for John was reduced to about five hundred thousand pounds, the first payment to be handed over on the first of August of 1359. Edward III would release King John, in exchange of a number of very important noblemen of France as hostages, as well as for the handing over of twenty walled towns to English garrisons. The Dauphin Charles, disgusted with this outrageous proposal, called the Estates General together, and the Estates formally rejected the clauses with indignation. The Estates voted for the continuance of the war with England.

The dauphin still lacked funds in the summer of 1359, the royal treasury having been reserved for the payment of the ransom of his father, the king. The noblemen of France also followed him only half-heartedly, as the king still lived. Neither Charles nor King John II had the resources to pay for further instalments of the ransom. Charles of Navarre still menaced to seize the throne of France. The Dauphin Charles had no money to pay for a standing army, not even for calling together his feudal lords and their men-at-arms, and pay for the upkeep of this army on campaign. It was the darkest hour of France!

\*\*\*\*\*

The aldermen of Ghent urged the count of Flanders, Louis of Male, to help put a halt to the departure of master-weavers from their town. Louis of Male reacted by allowing the exiled men and families to return to Ghent, but the measures aimed at suppressing the political power of the guild remained in effect. The count feared the power of the weavers. Brokers and drapers returned from England, among them for the second time James van Artevelde's son Philip. The poorters had once more indicated the van Artevelde family as possible

insurgents, and banished them. The aldermen of Ghent rewarded the journeymen dyers substantial wage increases in 1358, so that they also would return and work in Ghent. The unrest of the weavers, their discontent, continued to grow in Flanders. In May of 1358, uprisings happened in the towns of Bruges and Ieper, instigated by the weavers. The weavers gained the upper hand. Bruges, even took on the red hoods, the symbol of the Parisian dominance of Etienne Marcel.

In June of that year, the weavers of Ghent forced an inquiry into the administration of the city for the last ten years of dominance by the lineages of the landowner-poorters, and in July the weavers revolted openly. They ran in arms through the streets of Ghent. A short but wild battle was fought once again with the fullers, which made less victims than the previous such internecine battles. Finally, the weavers having defeated the fullers, their armed men forced the aldermen to make changes in the measures directed against them. The weavers gained back their rights to organise into a guild, led by a dean chosen by them only instead of by a director assigned by the aldermen. They received the right to participate once more in the councils of Ghent. No more special taxes would be levied on their crafts, and the *mittens* they had paid the last sixteen years for the mere exercise of their craft, would be paid back to them. The weavers who had been taken a hostage in 1349, would be delivered from prison, and receive six grooten per day they had passed, deprived of their liberty. This amount would be paid out by Ghent to the families, whether the imprisoned weavers still lived or not. The town was allowed to spread these payments over the next sixteen years, for otherwise the city of Ghent would have been broke.

By the end of 1359, the weavers thus shared power again with the guilds of the fullers and with the small guilds. From this year and the next on, Count Louis of Male allowed most of the people who had been banished from Ghent in 1349, to return.

The influence of the weavers increased steadily in Ghent. In mid-February of 1360, the dean of the fullers was deposed. Power in Ghent was now shared by the landowner-poorters, the small guilds and the weavers. The weavers had felt strong enough to discharge the fullers from the government of the city. The fullers could no longer become aldermen, and their deans were replaced by directors appointed by the aldermen. The political influence of the fullers had been effectively suppressed under the influence of the weavers.

Count Louis of Male reacted of course against the resurgence of the power of the weavers. In Ieper, the men-at-arms of the count helped the knights-poorters to suppress the revolt of the weavers. More than fifteen hundred weavers were put to death. In Bruges also, the city was forced to limit the liberties of the town to the count's authority. In Ghent, peace had been restored, and Count Louis of Male received guarantees the weavers would not revolt against his rule. Flanders could work in relative peace from the middle of the year 1360 on. Other dangers lurked, however.

\*\*\*\*\*

The truce between France and England had ended. The Treaties of London had been rejected by the Estates General of France and by the dauphin. King Edward III therefore brought together by the end of October of 1359 a fleet of about eleven hundred cogs for a new campaign in France. He sailed from Sandwich on the twenty-eight of October 1359 with about twelve thousand men-at-arms on board, archers and knights, three thousand horses and one thousand wagons. The best among his warlords accompanied him: the Captal de Buch, Sir John Chandoz, Sir Walter Manny, Sir Hugh Calvely, numerous earls and his son, the prince of Wales. Since all his overtures and proposals for peace had been rejected, King

Edward's aim was to force a punishment campaign on France, and to march to Rheims to be crowned king of France there.

On the first of November 1359, the English army marched out of Calais, cruelly devastating a broad lane through Artois, Picardy, Thiérache and the Champagne regions. On the first of December, the English royal army arrived at Rheims without having been hindered by any royal French army of substance. The English troops were harassed by groups of French warriors, who tried to scatter and interrupt the provisioning of food and other necessities to the English, but no battle could be delivered.

At Rheims, Gaucher de Châtillon strengthened the defences of the town, so that the English had to besiege the city in due form. The English army set up a camp of tents in view of Rheims, but it was a very cold and also humid winter that year. The English starved, for small groups of French warriors had evacuated all the food that could be found in the region, and destroyed the rest. Finding food and fodder became a major worry for the besieging army. King Edward III had to face the hard truth it was impossible to capture a well-defended, walled city like Rheims in winter. He had to save his army from starvation. His dreams of being crowned king of France with great pomp in Rheims cathedral were shattered. After a siege of forty days at Rheims, Edward retreated south, marching to the confines of Nevers and Burgundy. From there, devastating everything in his wake, burning villages and killing every living soul in the countryside, he turned against Paris. Paris too proved impregnable, too large, too well defended by too many men. By the end of March of 1360, the English army had destroyed everything there was to destroy east and south of Paris, setting up camp at Chartres.

French resistance was not entirely quenched. The English army of King Edward could not be attacked frontally, so the French tried attacks elsewhere. A French fleet launched an assault against Winchelsea in mid-March of 1360, with a force of two thousand men-at-arms and sailors. Winchelsea and also Rye were sacked and burnt, sowing panic in London and Kent. The invasion was repelled already after one day, and the French hastily returned to their ships, but a dire warning had been delivered: you harass us, we can harass you! The French royal troops could still sting! King John II was moved precipitously to a castle nearer London, and then imprisoned in the Tower.

On the thirteenth of April, King Edward's army in France still camped at Chartres. A terrible hailstorm destroyed the environs of Chartres. It seemed a celestial warning had been issued to Edward III for his devastating campaign in France. Hailstones as large as fists fell on his men with tremendous force in curtains of ice. The hailstorms killed more than one thousand English warriors on the day that would long afterwards be called Black Monday by the English. Thousands of horses were killed. Edward's army remained in disarray for many days, most of the tents having been destroyed, and also the food supplies for the English camp.

The English army then still remained at Chartres, threatening Paris, where the Dauphin Charles had gathered some troops. The abbot of the large abbey of Cluny in Burgundy agreed to arbitrate between the French and the English, offering peace proposals. King Edward III, having been turned away ignominiously from the walls of Rheims and of Paris by the defenders of the cities, and heeding the divine warning of Black Monday, accepted these peace negotiations.

The delegates of France and England met from the first to the eighth of May of 1360 in the castle of Brétigny near Chartres. A Peace Treaty was reached on the eighth of May, which was thereafter called the Peace Treaty of Brétigny.

In this very important agreement, King Edward III gave up on his demands for Normandy, Brittany, the region of Tours, the counties of Maine and Anjou, but he received Guyenne and Gascony entirely, as well as Calais, Ponthieu and Guines, the Poitou region, the Périgord, the Limousin, the Angoumois, the county of Guare and Saintonge. He renounced on his claims to the throne of France. Edward III promised also nor he nor his heirs would lend assistance to the Flemish cities against the kings of France. The English alliance with Flanders was thus terminated and abandoned. The king of France, in counter-part, abandoned his alliance with the Scottish noblemen.

Brétigny promised, if not a final peace, at least a truce of many, many years to the kings of France and England! Forty French hostages were to be handed over to the English, in exchange for the release from prison of King John II. The ransom for the French king remained at three million écus d'or.

On the eighteenth of May of 1360, King Edward III sailed back to England from Honfleur, to the port of Rye. The Peace Treaty of Brétigny was feasted in England during two weeks. The French and the English people could hope peace had set in between the belligerent kings. In July of 1360, the French court found the means to pay for the next instalment of the ransom for the French king. Isabella, the daughter of John II, was to be married to the son of the Italian, Milanese tyrant Galeazzo Visconti for six hundred thousand gold florins! In the month of October of 1360, King John II was brought to Calais by the English, where he waited for his release with his son Philip - who was already called the Bold -, for the payment of the next four hundred thousand écus d'or. That ransom money was delivered from Visconti funds. The Peace treaty of Brétigny was ratified at Calais.

The French hostages departed for England. Among them were two sons of John II, Louis who would become the future duke of Anjou, and John the future duke of Berry. Also went to England as hostage the king's brother, who was the duke of Orléans, and the duke of Bourbon who was the brother-in-law of the Dauphin Charles. Many other counts of the highest nobility of France sailed as hostages to England. Among them was Count Enguerrand de Coucy, the most powerful noble of Picardy. The Peace of Brétigny had been paid very dearly by France, but also Edward III had not reached his aims of gaining the crown of France. French King John II was released from prison.

## The second Outbreak of the Plague

In October of 1360, the Fremineuren monk Evrard Vresele asked his brother Gillis for a general meeting of the Pharaïldis families. Most of us met regularly to hear the progress of our funds and lands, reports given by Boudin Vresele, Nete de Hert and me, Jehan Terhagen. This time, Evrard asked for a special meeting and to assemble as many men and women of the Pharaïldis families as could come together. When Evrard asked for such a special general meeting, something of the highest importance was up, something that had nothing to do with our money, and something, we feared, that bade nothing good. Gillis called the meeting to take place at Beoostenblije, so we knew when the messengers brought us the invitation, Count Louis of Male might join us. Heyla de Smet, the count's mistress, had agreed to host the meeting.

We arrived at Beoostenblijje with more men and women than usual. Several women would participate, proof of the increasing importance of women in our discussions. When I arrived with Quintine, my closest family, Gillis Vresele, his brother Evrard, his son Boudin and Boudin's wife Margaret, sat already in the great hall with Heyla. Boudin had married very discreetly at about the same time as I. There had been no feast or banquet for his marriage with Margaret van Westvelde, a woman who originated from a very respectable, old family of Ghent, a family that counted aldermen among their well-known members, because Margaret's mother had died only a week before the marriage. Margaret had been pregnant, she had to confess, so the wedding had not been postponed. This had caused some commotion in the van Westvelde family, but the marriage had proved sound and happy ever since. They had two children by now, Gillis the Younger and Agneete. Boudin seemed to rely much on Margaret's opinion, but I had not met her often in the last ten years. She was a very fine, lovely and vivid woman.

Heyla de Smet throned at the head of the table, of course, ordering the servants about to bring in wine and cakes. She had taken on weight, had become something of a contented matron, but her beauty had not diminished. Age gave her a dignity we had not expected in a de Smet girl. Her family arrived a little later. John de Smet rode in the courtyard with Wouter de Smet the Younger, the acclaimed hero of the Battle of Scheut against the Brabanders. John de Smet had inherited the talent of a jeweller from his father, his talent being far greater even than his father's, but he had not transmitted the dexterity to his son, Wouter the younger. Wouter preferred to become a money-changer, as also his grandfather had been. He was evolving much more into serving us as a banker, and other merchants of Ghent too saw a banker in him. He had begun to compete with the bankers of Bruges! He was rapidly getting rich from his own money. Wouter the Younger's wife was pregnant again, so she had preferred not to travel. She had remained in Ghent.

Somewhat later still, and together, arrived the Denout and the de Hert families. Pieter Denout the fuller, entered with his wife, Kerstin de Hert. He spoke very friendly with John de Hert, the shipper, and with John's wife, Beatrise van Vaernewijc. Beatrise too was a radiant woman, who got along well with Heyla. Nete de Hert, still unmarried, spinster, lean and straight, fine and kind, entered the hall. She came in with Clais de Hert and Alise van Lake, who were now also a married couple since ten years, as I and Wivine Denout. I, Jehan Terhagen, had not come with Wivine, but with her twin sister Quintine. At New Terhagen, Quintine was my counsellor – if not to say master – so her place was justified at the family meeting. Wivine had stayed at Terhagen with the children. With me came Martin Denout and Avezoete van Lake, Martin's wife. They had left their children with Wivine.

Ever since we managed our funds together in one consortium, Boudin Vresele handled our investments of commerce. His direct assistant was Boudin van Lake, who was still learning the trade with Boudin, but who promised to become as fine a manager of funds as the Vresele Boudin. We had begun calling them Boudin One and Boudin Two. Nete de Hert was our accountant, Wouter de Smet our banker. I, Jehan Terhagen, saw to our real estate, our lands. I bought and sold polders, fields and pastures, farms and manors. My assistant was Martin Denout. Geert van Dorp, who now lived at Old Terhagen, managed our farms. He was my steward and head-farmer. He was not considered a Pharaïldis man, so I had not brought him with us, but his rôle in our association was not to be under-estimated. Clais de Hert was inscribed in the shippers' guild. At first, he had not showed much taste for the water, for the rivers, canals and the sea. These feelings had remained, but he had more and more taken over

the work of John de Hert at their offices of the ship-trade in Ghent. John de Hert was now as much a patriarch as Gillis Vresele, Pieter Denout and John de Smet, with the monk Evrard Vresele.

Clais de Hert was no captain of ships, as his father had been, but he bought cogs and *pleiten* and *duermen*, and put them to work. His cogs were based at Sluis and at Antwerp. Had Count Louis of Male asked him, Clais would have been able to present to the count all by himself a small Flemish fleet! He owned a shipping company now, and managed that company not from on board of one of his cogs, but from out of extensive offices near his house in Ghent. He was also a ship-builder of smaller vessels near the Lieve Canal. Our goods were mostly transported on de Hert ships. Clais contributed larger and larger amounts of money to Boudin Vresele and to me, managing all our issues of logistics, not merely the transport by sea or by road but also the storing and delivery of goods. He transported everything, from wine to jewels to meat, grain, fruit, hops for breweries, and everything else. My Lammin Metsers and Lauwers Christiaens had built large storehouses for him near the Lieve.

‘Yes,’ began our host Heyla de Smet, ‘Louis will arrive in the evening. He has come from the farthest, from his castle of Male. He has promised to come, though. Who should start our talks? I suppose you should be our first speaker, Reverend Evrard. You scared me out of my wits by calling us together for an urgency. I’m afraid you are the messenger of bad tidings.’ ‘It seems so indeed, does it not?’ Gerard Vresele agreed.

Evrard was about my age, forty years old, a man who had learned to live in harmony with his mind. He lived well too, for he was developing a paunch. Evrard held a silence for a few moments, so that we hung at his lips. He sought the appropriate words to start his story. ‘You all know we had a plague year in 1349,’ he said, ‘and that sickness caused the death of many people. Lately, I received almost at the same time disturbing messages from two sources. Brother-monks from the south of France brought me letters from our monasteries, and I also received a letter from our friend William van Lake, who is a doctor and a professor at the medical school of Montpellier. I needed to talk to you about these letters, for they are to the utmost disturbing!’

The messages given to me by the monks in person, have, I’m afraid, taken a long time to reach me. They mention a second wave of the plague is under way, which is very bad news indeed! The sickness rages once more in the south of France, coming from Lombardy. It must have reached far more northwards in the time the messages travelled, for it advances fast. I heard just a few days ago that the wife of the dauphin of France and also his two daughters have died within a few weeks of interval. Rumours go they have been poisoned by King Charles of Navarre, but the plague seems to be the most obvious cause.

We may expect the sickness once more in evil force over Flanders within one month from now, by the end of the year at the latest! That is what the monks told me, arriving from Paris, where the plague has already killed many people. The monks actually fled from the sickness. William van Lake also tells in his letter a new wave of the plague is coming, advancing northwards. William seems to be doing well and has remained in good health. He wrote to me of the plague in the most interesting terms. The symptoms, he wrote, are almost the same as during the previous wave, with two notable differences. William writes that people who contracted the sickness previously and survived the last time, seem not to suffer from the sickness this time. Children, however, especially the ones born after the first plague, are particular susceptible to this new kind of illness, maybe because this sickness seeks in particular the weaker humans, such as children. This plague shows less the symptoms of the blocking of our breathing system, so people seem to die slower than with that form of sickness. It kills slower, but kills nevertheless after from five to seven days, as the most common form of the previous wave. People who have been exposed to the plague the first

time may have developed some natural defence, the workings of which nobody knows anything about, but William observed people who have been sick do not get sick a second time. The school of Montpellier has still discovered no means, no recipe to cure the pestilence. William simply advises us to do the same as we did the last time: to isolate us from other people, especially from the ones who have contracted the sickness, because he is convinced a form of contagion, one person catching the disease from the other, is at work. He urges us to clean often everything from clothes to floors with water, even with hot, boiling water. He sent me a recipe for a mixture of oil, vinegar, thymus and a few other herbs, which seem to have some effect, if only to stop somebody from catching the disease from somebody else. He proposes to put this lotion on our visible limbs, our hands, and our face. I tried that out, but it is fairly disgusting, especially on one's face. We might apply it to the children first. William writes the sickness is as bad as the first time. The school of Montpellier, he added, was very good at all - almost mechanical - intervention of surgery, but the school knows nothing about the interior working of humans or animals, nothing about the working of the mind on our physical strength. On every other item but surgery, the Montpellier professors do not think and observe by themselves. They use the theory of the four humours, as much as the doctors do, and they have got no further. Here is what William writes on that subject. I read to you.'

Evrard opened a scroll of parchment he had held crised in his hands, and read.

'According to the humoral theory of Hippocrates, an ancient Greek doctor and philosopher, the state of a man or woman is caused by four bodily humours, which are yellow bile, black bile, phlegm and blood. These match the four seasons, respectively summer, autumn, winter and spring. The humours are also associated with the qualities of hot and cold, moist and dry, respectively hot and dry for the yellow bile, then cold and dry, cold and moist, hot and moist. Sickness, says the theory, comes from the imbalance of these humours in man, woman or child, so the doctors try to restore the balance. I have found texts indicating what kind of food should be prescribed in which season and for which imbalance. Other treatments include purging, blistering with salves and bloodletting. I spare you the details of when and for which imbalance each method is to be applied for. Where do the four humours originate from? From our digestive system, but the theory proposes the existence of four digestive systems. One is in the intestines to produce stool, one in the liver to produce the four humours in general, one in the blood vessels, eliminating through sweat and urine. The fourth digestion happens in the tissues, its wastes also being eliminated by urine and sweat. You would be surprised, Evrard, to learn that thousands of pages have been written on the subject. The imbalance of the humours for instance may also create the four temperaments of the choleric, the sanguine, the phlegmatic and the melancholic personalities.

I have read all there is to read on the subject, but never, never, never, Evrard, have I found any proof or justification of this system of the four humours!

Hippocrates wrote it existed, and hordes of doctors and professors have written books deducing what the theory could mean and how it could be used, enhancing to it and expanding it, but I have never read a tangible proof of any sort that anything of it is more than a proposition, than more than a possible proposal or explanation. I found never, nowhere, a proof the explanation was right!

When I asked this to the professors of Montpellier who taught me, all very intelligent, kind, well-meaning men, they looked at me totally stupefied, exclaiming, "of course it is true! Hippocrates said so! This and that famous professor, Galen for instance, said so! What else could there be as theory?"

Well, I tell you, Evrard, we doctors had better start looking for other theories, new theories which are more soundly justified than just by telling “Hippocrates wrote it was true, and all the other doctors too!”

What does this mean for the plague that is coming to you? Well, I have not seen one doctor in Ghent or in Montpellier cure one sole person by the theory of the four humours. What is more, Evrard, I have questioned doctors here, and I have not heard one explaining how one gets sick from the plague wave, and how then by restoring the actual imbalance between the four humours one actually cures somebody! Why does the sickness disturb the balance of the humours so badly, in thousands of people, and so suddenly? No answer!

So, Evrard, forget about doctors! They, as I, know nothing about the plague, and nobody knows how to cure it. That is the sad observation I have to make. I have therefore fallen back on the simplest of methods, dictated by my logic deduced from the few simple things I observed and which are therefore really true. Eat well all sorts of food, breathe in the healthy open air, do not eat too much meat and fat, train your body by walking or running a little each day, be moderate in everything, avoid getting upset, and steel your mind. Keep clean by washing often in water and a little vinegar, keep a man cold when he is too hot or warm when he feels cold, and lovingly care for him. Especially: while in the middle of the sickness wave, keep away from crowds, hide in your house, flee to the countryside, avoid all contact with people who already suffer from the illness or who have been in places where the sickness rages.

This second wave kills indiscriminately like the first, Evrard, but a few observations I find worth mentioning.

First, I have treated not one person who has become sick and survived during the first wave. Many people have told me they have caught the sickness before, and none of these has become sick now.

Second, take care for the children, for especially children are struck by this wave, which is terribly sad, for many families here lose all hope in doctors and in God when their children die. It is so sad to see the children die, Evrard, and not being able to help them! I am desperate, for there is so little I can do! I pray each day for God to save the children I am helping, but there is so very little, so very little I can do, and God seems to be deaf to my prayers.

I'm afraid we, doctors, are poor, inadequate, still very stupid men, and I don't know where or how to start looking for better explanations! The plague has reached Montpellier and is raging as I write you this letter. People are dying in greater numbers than ten years ago, and the younger people die more than the older ones. God bless you and preserve you, but don't hope for too much.'

Evrard closed the scroll and sighed.

'That is what William writes,' Evrard concluded, tears in his eyes.

A long silence, only interrupted by the sighs of the women, was then heard in the hall.

Gillis Vresele emerged first out of his thoughts and sadness

'Friends,' he said, 'we should apply then, what William proposes, God bless his soul. And our souls! We must move to the countryside, away from crowded Ghent. Not everybody can leave Ghent, but those who can must do so. Evrard will remain in his abbey, I suppose. I must stay in Ghent to handle affairs while Boudin leaves. No, Boudin, I want to hear no protests! We have to suspend our investments for the rest of this year, and probably also for most of next year. We must organise ourselves! Our survival is all-important. Jehan, my son, can you provide lodging for the Vresele and the van Lake families?'

‘We’ll make place in New Terhagen and try to live in as much comfort as possible,’ I agreed. ‘If necessary, we’ll build more rooms in the castle. New Terhagen is also well protected. Everybody is welcome, friends.’

Gillis nodded.

‘Martin,’ Gillis continued, ‘you live at Westdorp Manor. Can you take in Pieter and the de Hert family?’

‘Of course,’ Martin smiled. ‘I would like to fortify Westdorp some more, for we may expect bandits to want to seek refuge at Westdorp too. We must keep them out! Jehan’s construction workers can help. We can build quickly and have finished by the end of the year.’

‘Good! And the de Smet family can, I suppose remain at Beostenblijje?’ Gillis asked.

‘Yes. I will manage for that,’ Heyla de Smet agreed. ‘In the circumstances, Louis won’t mind. If a new wave of the sickness comes, Louis will probably stay at Male and travel little. I must tell him about what William proposed. Can I have a copy of William’s scroll?’

‘I have brought two copies with me already,’ Evrard Vresele said, handing one copy to me and one to Heyla. ‘We should expect the plague over Flanders and Ghent once more by the end of the year. We know the plague comes mainly in spring and summer, lingers on in autumn, but disappears in winter.’

Gillis said, ‘we must organise some form of sending messages, to be sent from me and from Evrard, from Ghent to near Terhagen and back. We need a place where letters can be left and taken up without contact by messengers. Letters must be brought to Beostenblijje, Terhagen and Westdorp.’

‘We own an isolated farm near Zelzate,’ I proposed. ‘A small house, a cabin merely, has been cleared out there, near the gate of the farm. Letters can be deposited there in a hidden, open space in the wall. I’ll give you a paper with the description of exactly where the letters can be placed and fetched. Martin, Heyla and I can send somebody in turns to that site and distribute the letters.’

‘Fine, fine! I hope and pray God we may all survive this ordeal too,’ Gillis Vresele concluded. ‘We must still hear how you feel about our business ventures and about Ghent. Does everybody have something unusual to add we don’t yet all know?’

We looked at each other.

‘There is maybe something, yes,’ Boudin van Lake started hesitatingly.

We were astonished, for Boudin was the youngest among us.

‘I have noticed,’ he continued, ‘that although the weavers have won back the privileges and the rights of their craft in Ghent without the payment of special taxes, the exodus of weavers from our city continues unabatedly, and that despite the few favourable measures of the aldermen and of the count. I have asked around among the weavers, and they told me there was no real reason anymore to remain in Ghent. Competition from Italian quality cloth is rapidly rising, quality cloth is produced in many other, also the smaller cities of Flanders, some weavers move to England, where it is easier to get to the best wools, and in all those other places taxes on weavers and on weaving are lower, and life is easier, the cost of living cheaper. The weavers I spoke to expect more of their kind to leave the city. When one weaver leaves, he takes at least four or five persons of his family with him, often more, for in his family are spinning women, carders, dyers, even fullers. Not just one family also leaves with one weaver, but as high as a dozen or twenty more people! Fewer and fewer people will live in Ghent tomorrow.’

‘True,’ Gillis consented to this picture. ‘I know to be true what young Boudin states. It is a sad matter to ascertain, but the population of Ghent is steadily declining in numbers. My son Boudin will confirm the cloth trading diminishes in the profits he makes from our investments. It proves once more to us, Pharaïldis men, we must put our money and our

efforts not only to the cloth industry, but watch out for whatever can bring in profits. We must be versatile in our views. Is that not exactly what we have been doing these last years? The principle is sound. When profits decline in one trade, we make our profits from trading in other products.’

Boudin Vresele added, ‘and I announce we expanded into the other trades indeed. The grain trade with France has been very difficult the last years. Picardy has been pillaged, burnt, its farmers killed. Very many fields are lying fallow, by lack of men to work in the fields. Merchants have been killed, so we must look for other contacts. Less people are honest and God-fearing. It is a sad story. The English army, the mercenary bands of the Free Companies, the *Jacquerie*, and plundering by the lords of the castellanies have destroyed so much over there, not far enough grain is produced in Picardy. We have sought alternative sources, and we are more and more importing grain from the Baltic lands and from northern Germany. Since it is we who are seeking contacts directly with the Germans, we do not have to pass through the middlemen of Bruges and Sluis, many of whom are Lombards. The headquarters of the German Hanse is back at Bruges, but we deal with the *Kaufmänner* of Bruges in Germany directly, and have our grain transported on our own ships to Antwerp. That has made the de Herts popular with the German Hanse, for they have noticed how reliable John de Hert is. That in its turn, brought us additional trade and additional transport!’

‘True, true,’ John de Hert agreed. ‘We have now ships which do not even sail anymore between Antwerp and Sluis to the German ports, but which sail under German captains between German ports, and between Baltic ports and Danish ports. We are more and more tolerated, even appreciated there. I have thought of establishing our own trade houses in Copenhagen and in Lübeck, and of joining the German Hanse.’

‘We must find capable persons to manage all that,’ I remarked, ‘but with a new wave of the plague coming to us, not only will we have to postpone such plans, we also will have it very difficult to hire good people. These issues will remain for a few years after the plague has finished. The pestilence blocks our expansion!’

‘If we survive,’ Evrard stated sombrely.

‘If we survive indeed,’ I repeated. ‘Our ambitions are high, but our profits will dwindle for a few years. They may be reduced to nothing next year, then remain very low for the next two years. In Bruges, everything is very reserved and organised, closed for newcomers such as us who want a piece of the cake. Antwerp, however, is wide open for opportunities of trade and transport. I suppose, also from John’s example, Flanders is getting too small for us.’

Everybody smiled.

‘That was a fine analysis,’ Count Louis of Male exclaimed, surprising us all, bursting into the room and immediately stepping up to Heyla, embracing her, lifting her from the ground, choking her.

We remarked Heyla de Smet was still the great sweetheart, the love of the count.

‘I know, I know, Reverend Evrard, you are going to tell us another wave of the plague is going to reach Flanders soon. I have heard of it, too. I know it will happen. Let’s talk about it. But first, have I not reached my objectives, as I promised you? Yes, Flanders is too small for us!’

Louis of Male laughed out loud.

‘I heard you say a few words about Antwerp. Antwerp is ours, gentlemen, and as I have conquered it, it is now up to you to make of Antwerp one more centre of Flemish trade. I want Antwerp to become as large a port and as fortunate and prosperous as Bruges and Sluis! Antwerp is our gate to Brabant and to the entire German empire, by sea and by land! You have taught me to open eyes into the future, and that is what I do! We have conquered the

northern seas, for the German Hanse has placed its headquarters at Bruges. The real key to the interior of Brabant, Hainault, the entire Low Countries, Luxemburg and the south-west of the German lands, is Antwerp! What a pearl in our crown can Antwerp become! And the city that links France via Bruges to the northern coasts and via Antwerp to the eastern interior lands, is Ghent! You have a bright future for Ghent in front of you, and much work. I count on you to work on those axes. What would Flanders be without trade? I did my best to bring you the opportunities, the general and geographic means, now it is up to you to exploit them! Do it well! We lost hundreds of militiamen in the war, which I regret. Make sure those lives have not been spent for nothing. You can save the lives of tens of thousands of Flemings from misery and dishonourable death by bringing us wealth by trade!

‘You have a fine vision of the future, lord count,’ Gillis Vresele admitted, ‘and we should thank you and congratulate you for that vision. You are the first count of Flanders to reflect on matters of economy and well-being for our county. We’ll augment our efforts of trade. We have just been discussing, however, a period of very troubled times may be ahead of us because of a new wave of the sickness, a new Great Mortality. We would like to present the issues to you, and how we hope to handle them. Patience will be needed in many ventures.’

‘I know, I know, I know, I understand,’ Louis of Male replied, making a violent gesture with his right hand, suddenly worried.

His eyes lost their brilliance and he looked at Heyla.

‘Gentlemen, I only hope the ones I love will be spared, but that is in the hands of God. I continue believing that if we do what is good and correct, God will protect us, save us, and reward us. For the rest, we can have patience. What is the life of one man? How short life is! The truth is also, we need a period of respite. France and England have concluded a peace treaty right in time. I guess both kings, Edward III and John II, had news of the impending plague in their ears. I believe that fact too weighed on the speed with which they concluded their treaty of Brétigny. Why, think of it! They have been discussing and cursing at each other and negotiating, throwing arguments from here to there, for years and years, and now, in May, they concluded in eight days! Was that not a miracle? Think what you will, I believe the kings felt the pressure of a new wave of the sickness on them. King Edward III is tired of fighting, and the Dauphin Charles, for whom I have much sympathy though he remains dangerous for Flanders and for me, has more issues in his head than he can handle and pay to solve! No, there will be peace for a long period, gentlemen, though probably not forever. God has sent us yet another scourge to keep us busy. The new plague will also mean tens of thousands of dead people within Flanders. I know that all too well!

First, I thank the Vresele family for having brought me the standard of Brabant! I heard the standard had been conquered by a man called Heinric Vresele, the clerk of the good city of Ghent. I knew the *Gentenaars* were as fine warriors as they were excellent traders, still I am grateful.

Furthermore, we can now also hope for a period of rest and peace in Ghent, for although the weavers are back in power, they still do not rule alone, and the Peace of Brétigny has dissolved their alliance with England. The weavers cannot any longer look to England for help! I hope they would now look to me, and I will prove a graceful lord to them!’

Louis sighed. He held the silence. Then, he resumed, but whispering, almost as if he talked to himself only.

‘I have no male heir,’ he said with bitterness in his voice. ‘I can have male children, as Heyla has proven with my dear Robert, but I have no male, legitimate heir. My dream of a very strong county to balance the power of France and England in our region, will nevertheless be

realised by other men to whom I, Louis of Male, will give the means to realise them. My daughter, my heir, has married the duke of Burgundy. Can you imagine what a combination that will be? With Flanders, the duke of Burgundy and of Flanders will be as powerful, if not more powerful, as the king of France! John II was very pleased when I told him of that marriage, for he thought Flanders would pass into French hands finally, but he forgot the combination might be straight in the way of his further ambitions! The House of Burgundy can aim for Brabant, for Holland and Zeeland, for Hainault, Namur, and who knows which territories more! There is a dream for you! How easy would it be to trade in such a unified space? How many crafts and agriculture ventures are just waiting to be developed in such a space of the most fertile fields on earth and with the most intelligent, hard-working people in the world eager for the developing? And what will be the centre of it all, gentlemen? Not Dijon, not Bruges, but Ghent, my friends! How about that for a dream? Ghent will be the centre of another empire! Don't you think we can do whatever we want when we set our minds to it?'

Count Louis of Male had changed from an almost broken man, standing bowed, head to the ground before us, into a towering monarch, fists clenched, looking wildly around him, as Louis the Conqueror. His voice thundered his last phrases.

Gillis Vresele wondered whether Louis of Male did not tell exactly the same story to the men of Bruges, but with Bruges as the centre of the world. It was also a vision of expansion, and expansion meant almost certainly war and battles. Still, the vision was grand! He did admire the man who could reconcile with the fate of not having male heirs by a vision for another empire. Such visions of power, of wealth, of grandeur, were also what drove the Pharaïldis men these days. Gillis remembered how he had helped his father merely to survive, to grab some coins when all was lost, and start anew. A new world had dawned, indeed! The lineage of the counts of Flanders, the ancient lineages of the Dampierres and the Béthunes would die with Louis of Male, however. Louis would be the real and last count of Flanders if his vision was realised, but it would mount to the skies as part of a bigger whole that would be a splendid jewel on the continent. How had this ambitious but shy young man grown into an adult man who found the strength and the harmony of soul to want to see far beyond the fate of his own family? Louis might have acted in a less dignified manner! He could have his wife killed, have his illegitimate son be legitimised, for one. Gillis admired Louis of Male for having chosen the dignified way of having set history back on its momentum to realise a new counter-weight to France and England.

Gillis replied to the count, 'England has abandoned its twenty-year old alliance with Flanders in the Peace of Brétigny.'

'Yes, Edward III has done that,' Louis of Male replied. 'He has not stopped trade with Flanders, however. The cities of Flanders and the lords of the castellanies have reconciled with their count. So have the guilds of the cities. We are united again, gentlemen, strong as a closed fist, and therefore as strong as France or England. We do not have to worry France will want to absorb us, and as I said, the king of France may not realise it yet, but Flanders and Burgundy together will become a challenge for the next kings of France. We keep our trade of wool with England, for Edward III needs the crumbles of our money, and we are secured from aggression. We are now sided with France, but with a France that has realised it cannot put its hands on our county. We hold Flanders in feudal fief of France, but the conflict in which we had to declare neutral, has ended. It is not a worry anymore for Flanders!'

At that point, I dared to contradict the count.

I, Jehan Terhagen, said, 'there is another vision at work, lord count, a grand vision, too!'

‘What is that?’ Louis asked, astonished I dared to bring up a grander vision than his own. ‘Consider the territory in which the royal domains lay,’ I continued. ‘Consider the land bordered on the west by the sea, to the south by the Pyrenees and by the Mediterranean, to the south-east by the Alps and more to the north-east by the Rhine, then to the north by the counties of the Holy Roman Empire. This territory has the shape of a hexagon. What the kings of France want, I believe, is to call not only their current domains by the name of France, but everything within the borders I have enumerated! Normandy and Brittany and Aquitaine will be part of that country, the Provence and Savoy to, the lands of Lorraine and Alsace, maybe even parts of the lands of the Swiss. Granted the king of France is not powerful enough to win from the German Emperor, there is one land belonging to France that sticks out from the borders I sketched, a land to the north, Flanders. Flanders belongs already to feudal France, not yet in complete possession of the king of France. I repeat, the grand vision of the kings of France is to call France the entire hexagon I have drawn. Burgundy lies in the hexagon. Sooner or later, the French kings will want to gobble up Burgundy, as they will want to gobble up Normandy and Brittany and Aquitaine, and so on. Their vision does not stop at Burgundy! It will not stop with a Burgundy made more powerful with Flanders and Flanders made more powerful with Burgundy. It was because the king of France wanted to gobble up Flanders your forefathers were imprisoned in Paris, and why we fought the Golden Spurs!’

Count Louis de Male stared at me, then burst out in laughing. ‘By God, I believe you are right! Nevertheless, I don’t have to make it easy for the kings of France, don’t I? By joining Flanders to Burgundy, we and Burgundy can make it a lot harder for the kings to realise their vision. And yes, maybe, probably, eventually, there will be a war between the kings and the descendants of the duke of Burgundy and of my Margaret. Well, that will be far in the future, and I damn sure hope our descendants will win! Bust the kings of France with their vision!’ Louis of Male continued to laugh hard. I laughed with him. There was nothing else to do but fight the French vision, indeed! Male’s good mood was a little broken, though.

The Pharaïldis men cast a dignified silence. Then, Evrard started to explain about the coming plague. Count Louis of Male too asked for a copy of the letter of William van Lake. When the subject of the sickness was exhausted, we talked about the situation of Ghent, and more particularly about the weavers having gained more political power in the city, but more and more weavers leaving the town. Louis of Male explained us how much he thought about balancing the powers in Flanders, of which there were many. He understood the power of the weavers was like a steaming kettle. One had to lift the lid of the kettle once every while, he said, to let off steam. He had avoided dangerous revolts by alternatively giving some power back to the weavers, and yet having them share power also with the other guilds and the other forces in the town. If the weavers left Ghent, they would become less and less powerful, which could be good. Of course, he did not want to kill off the weaving industry of the city! The new power came from the small guilds, he surmised. All is a matter of balance, Louis estimated, and he had to prove a master-juggler in that game. Louis thought the weavers had come back to some power in Ghent, but a power they had been forced to share. Louis would never give them total power, so if some weaver wanted to leave Ghent and in doing so spread the knowledge of producing the best quality cloth in Flanders, he would not stop that movement. If Ghent would become less wealthy from producing cloth, then that should not necessarily be the case for the whole of Flanders. It could become richer by other crafts and from trade. Additional trade via Antwerp would help and was a fine opportunity. Besides, the count stated, we must wait for the effect of the new plague. The plague would hit Ghent once more severely, more than other towns of Flanders, and that could change dramatically the relations of power. We discussed these matters until late in the night. Count Louis of Male did

not seem to be perturbed by the Pharaïldis women several times stating their opinions. Louis had become his own man, we noticed, but was he also not the man and the product of Heyla de Smet, of a Pharaïldis woman?

\*\*\*\*\*

We weathered through the second plague as we had planned during the memorable meeting with Count Louis of Male at the end of October of 1360. We had a plan, and we used William van Lake's observations. Because we planned more than most people in Flanders, we thought we could control the vagaries of life, so we felt powerful, though also scared. Our ability to plan was our strength, but every strength is also a weakness, for in reality, we controlled nothing at all, certainly not God's design for us, and not the unpredictable ways in which nature worked. Deep in our souls, we knew that. So we suffered in our flesh, like any other family of Ghent.

We did as we had agreed on our formal Pharaïldis meeting at Beoostenblijje in October of 1360. From November of that year on, New Terhagen became once more crowded. We created space and living quarters where we had not enough, and I used the rest of October to have the workers of Lammin Metsers build yet new quarters inside our castle, against the walls, taking more space from our large courtyard. I also had a wall built around our garden at the back, so that we could walk freely there when the sun shone, which effectively enlarged our protected space. That wall was very high and on top we fixed spikes of irons.

Gillis, Heinric and Evrard Vresele remained in Ghent. They formed our links with the city. Boudin Vresele, his wife Margaret and their two children moved in with us. Also Boudin van Lake, his wife Agte and their two children moved into New Terhagen. Lammin Metsers and Lauwers Christiaens, our mason and brickyard-owner, moved to Old Terhagen, but they brought each their two grown-up sons with their wives and children, over a dozen people, to Old Terhagen. We fortified Old Terhagen better, and also there built stone houses in a long row against the interior walls.

We devised a complex scheme to provision both Old and New Terhagen with fresh food from our farms and from the sea. We took in as much food as we could, but we would never be able to isolate us completely from the outside world, because we could not store enough food for an entire year of isolation.

Since our self-inflicted isolation could only be a relative one, I had thought about what we should do when, despite all protective measures, one or a few persons would get sick. We needed a place where we could separate the sick from the healthy! So we built something that might be called our hospital hall outside Old Terhagen. I also asked Lammin Metsers to add a large room to our boathouse. This room would serve for the sick of New Terhagen. It could be closed to the bad weather, could be heated in winter, and I intended bringing the sick here and separate them from the rest of us. I proposed the same scheme to Heyla de Smet at Beoostenblijje and to Martin Denout at Westdorp. They too set up a separate house for the sick, hoping they would not suffer from the plague and not having to use the place. For that, we had to build a new hall near Beoostenblijje, but could use an uninhabited cabin that had been left in ruins in the large garden of Westdorp Manor.

We had much work to do before the end of the winter, so much to organise before March or April, before the time we expected the plague to really terrify Flanders, Ghent and Axel. Our main aim was to protect our children.

At Beoostenblijje, Heyla de Smet took in John de Smet and his wife Marie Vresele, with Wouter the Younger and his wife Amalberga with their two children. Heyla herself had now three children, and she was very happy to be pregnant of a fourth child of Louis of Male. At Westdorp lived Martin Denout and his wife Avezoete with their two young children. They had been able to persuade their father Pieter, who lived with his wife Kerstin in Ghent, to join them. They took in the other members of the de Hert family. John de Hert and his wife Beatrise came to Westdorp, as well as Clais de Hert and his wife Alise van Lake, with their three children.

We waited anxiously for the spring of 1361 to arrive with the plague. Each month we received letters from Gillis, Evrard or Heinric Vresele, placed in the cabin we had arranged. The plague hit Ghent earlier than we had expected! It came in force in the late autumn of 1360.

Evrard Vresele sent us a letter we only opened in January of 1361, reading the plague had reached our fine city. Yes, people had begun to die in Ghent, but many people also recovered easier. Fewer people seemed to die rapidly, so the kind of sickness that made them choke to death in a day or two seemed to hit less the community. The number of total dead was less, but higher in the most populated and poorer quarters of the town, and this was also merely the first stage of the spread of the disease.

The very first victim in our family was Gillis Vresele!

Evrard wrote in very sad terms, which made also our women cry, how Gillis, who was then sixty-seven years old, had caught the disease, had been brought to the Bijloke convent to be helped with much love by the nuns and by Evrard, but Gillis had aged rapidly after we met the last time. He succumbed to the illness in five days. He did not suffer much, and passed away slowly. Gillis had died with his right hand in Evrard's hand, his left in the hand of the abbess of the Bijloke. His last words had been for the Pharaïldis families, saying goodbye to them, telling how fine he found the grandchildren of himself and of his dear friends of the Pharaïldis families. He had wished us luck, regretting not being able to see us all a last time after the end of the plague.

Boudin Vresele, who lived with us at New Terhagen, was inconsolable for two months. Only far into spring could we see him walking in the garden of New Terhagen with his wife and see him smile. We had all loved Gillis, of course, the very second patriarch of the Pharaïldis families. Also at Beoostenblijje and Westdorp, the dismay was great and general. Heyla told me Gillis's daughter Marie had been struck by the greatest grief. Marie wailed, cried and wept for weeks before her husband could console her.

Quintine and I had suffered from the disease during the first plague wave, so, reading William's observation, I suspected we were rather well protected against the new sickness, and would not get sick. At the end of the plague, we proved William right, for Quintine and I came into contact with people who had the sickness, and we did not get ill. We survived easily.

By May only, in late spring, did the sickness reach Axel, late but soon enough. Geert van Dorp told me about that, and announced he would from then on apply the strictest orders of isolation for Old Terhagen, to which I agreed fully. We had taken in provisions in our manors to hold out for three months at least. From then on, the only man to ride regularly between Beoostenblijje, Westdorp and Terhagen, was I, Jehan Terhagen! I strongly believed the sickness could not touch me, but each time I came back from one of such trips, I left my horse

at the boathouse, washed there, washed my clothes in water and vinegar, and waited a full day before I went back on foot to New Terhagen.

The worst worries I had, came at the beginning of the summer. The sickness raged then totally in Ghent, told Evrard Vresele in his letters. When the plague had arrived, it had developed more slowly than ten years ago, but the number of dead people rose steadily. Evrard expected somewhat less deceased people than the first time, but many children were affected, and few among these survived. Evrard considered especially the death of the children would push the population of Ghent further down in the next years.

‘The hope of Ghent is being killed in this plague,’ he wrote.

My terrible issue was that Boudin Vresele wanted to return to that Ghent, for when his father died, nobody remained in Ghent to supervise the trade activities. We would not only not profit from trade this year of 1361 nor probably the next because many ventures brought in money only one to two years afterwards, we would also start losing money. When one Boudin wanted to go, so did the other, and then also Clais, who had at Westdorp no idea about where his ships were and whether they had found cargo. He imagined most of these ships immobile in ports. He too would lose money from ships that didn't sail. The two Boudins and Clais told me of their determination to go back to work in Ghent sometime in the summer. I had a lot of trouble to keep them out of Ghent. I told them the worst had no doubt already happened with their businesses in Ghent. One or two months longer in their manors would harm them only marginally more. I told them their business would not be helped by them dying in their town houses. Luckily, Nete de Hert helped me. She had a lot of authority over the three men, which did astonish me too. She gave them the same arguments, with much more force, calling them irresponsible fools to return to Ghent. I too was furious the Boudins and Clais wanted to risk their lives, but when I thought of my properties in the Champagne and in the Land of Waas, lands I had not visited for over a year by then, my heart bled. I would find total negligence in my manors and lands in the Champagne, possessions managed by people I had only met a few times, which I could not trust completely because I had only known them for a few weeks, and who might have fallen victim to the plague also. I shut my mind to such considerations, convinced myself the worries about the money, trade and properties would have to be solved much later. I told the same to the Boudins and to Clais. Our spirits were low during those months of self-inflicted isolation, our moods sombre and irritated. Because of my resolve, however, which proved beneficial in the end, I gained in authority among the Pharaïldis families. To my astonishment, the men and women of our families increasingly came to me for advice and even for permission to start things. Was I the new patriarch of the Pharaïldis consortium? It seemed so, and the second plague wave seemed to have brought this status about!

We survived the plague at Old and New Terhagen, at Beostenblijde and Westdorp Manor. I rode to the abbey of Ter Hage. When I arrived the first time at the gate of the convent, the gates were closed, as expected, and all was very quiet in the neighbourhood. I had told Mother Amalberga everything I suspected about the plague, the little that might be of use to her. I had given her the letter of William van Lake. Amalberga simply grumbled she had suspected what William wrote about the doctors.

I stepped down from my horse, rang the bell, waited, and then, a small opening at eye's height opened.

A female voice asked, ‘my son, are you ill with the sickness?’

I replied, ‘no mother, not at all. Don't you recognise me? I'm Jehan Terhagen, a friend of Mother Amalberga. I would like to speak to her.’

The tired voice said, ‘oh yes, I see. Can you wait for a few moments? I’m going to fetch Mother Amalberga! You had better not come in, my son, for we have many sick. We don’t let anybody in who is not sick. Please wait a moment.’

I was glad Amalberga was still alive.

She opened the small door moments later, nevertheless blocking the door so that I could not get in, and saying, ‘Jehan, it is so nice to see you! How is your family?’

Mother Amalberga did not open her gate.

‘We are well, mother! We isolated ourselves at our manor, for we have families of Ghent in our houses, and we protect our people and our children. How are you? What is happening at the monastery?’

‘We are not doing well, Jehan!’ Mother Amalberga responded in a sad voice. ‘We only let sick people come in. We had the sick come to us and helped them as we always did, but we do not want the healthy to catch the sickness by coming into our abbey. They want to pray to God who now come here, and receive our blessings, but one can pray to God everywhere. We are not closer to God than any place on earth. The people are dying in our monastery, Jehan, and we can do almost nothing for them. The ones who survive help us, refuse even to leave. The nuns are dying too, but we hold on. We help the sick die peacefully, comforted by us and by our prayers. There is only desolation in our abbey, I’m afraid.’

‘Did you suffer many deaths?’

‘Yes, we did. So much we could not bury them anymore in the cemetery of our church. We had to build a new cemetery outside the confines of the convent. We bury many people to one grave, now, Jehan. Here, it is worse than ten years ago! The children die, Jehan! Oh my god, how many children die! The poor, poor children die!’

Mother Amalberga’s voice broke. She wept. I knew she would not have wept in front of her nuns. With me, she could cry. Maybe it was a consolation to her to be able to cry.

I wanted to go up to her and hug her, but she shouted, ‘don’t touch me, Jehan! William van Lake was right, the sickness is brought in by other people. It passes from one person to the other. We try to isolate the sick, and had some success, but now we have only sick in our abbey.’

She said, ‘don’t touch me,’ and put her hands in front of her, to ward me off like Jesus Christ had said the ‘noli me tangere’ to Mary Magdalene.

‘Is there anything I can do, mother?’ I asked. ‘We developed a system to bring provisions to our manors. I can order a few wagons to drop by, leave you with food and whatever you need. Have you got enough food?’

Mother Amalberga started crying again.

‘Heaven sends you to us always, Jehan, my friend! Yes, we need food, good, fresh food. We go to Axel, but every journey is an adventure and a suffering. Take care of bandits around Axel! Our wagons were stolen a few days ago, our servants began to refuse to ride to Axel. Yes, please, if you can bring us food, if only a little, and ale for the sick, we would be so pleased and helped so much!’

‘I will arrange for the food, mother, and don’t think of paying for it,’ I repeated. ‘The first wagon will arrive in two or three days at the most. We will unload the wagons in front of the gate, but my men will wait and guard until you have taken everything inside. There will be crossbows worn by the guards around the wagons, but the leader will wear a white piece of cloth around his arm and a banner with the badge of Ter Hage. Give the leader, whose name will be Mathis, a list of what you need. I may not get you everything, but I’ll do my best. Please put things in the list for which we do not have to ride into towns, we too try to avoid those!’

‘Thank you, Jehan, understood! God bless you!’

‘You know,’ I then said in a lower voice, ‘I can come in! I had the sickness the last time, so I believe it’ll not make me sick twice.’

‘I think you are right with that assertion,’ Mother Amalberga replied, ‘I had come to the same conclusion, and so did your friend William. Practically none of the people who were sick ten years ago are brought into the convent, and the nuns who survived last time are now tending the sick. Many others have died. Nevertheless, I’d rather not tempt the devil. I will not take the chance and let you in! We need you! Take good care of you, of Wivine, of Quintine, and especially of the children! Come and show them to me when all this is over.’

‘We will do that, mother. When this is over, we’ll invite you to a banquet at New Terhagen, and we’ll dance a jig together! I’ll go then, now. I’ll come back with the wagons, or Mathis will come alone. Prepare your list!’

Mother Amalberga smiled, ‘go with God, Jehan!’

And so we did.

Geert van Dorp and I had to find solutions to provision five sites from then on, including the monastery of Ter Hage, but that is what we did. Geert exhausted himself, but we succeeded in getting enough food in.

Like in the past, tens of people came weeping and shouting at our gates, asking for entry, asking to be sheltered, to be healed from the sickness, for the rumours spread nobody died at Old and New Terhagen, but we hardened our minds and let nobody in. I refused entry to everybody who was not yet inside. Geert van Dorp told me how tough it was to turn the families with children away, and he told we would make many enemies in the neighbourhood for our cold-heartedness, but I insisted. With the sickness inside our places, we would anyhow not be able to help anybody. What the people needed most was a hospital, but the only one in the environs was in the abbey of Ter Hage. Heyla de Smet and Martin Denout did the same as I with their manors. We protected our own.

We could not save them all.

At Beoostenblijje, in the heat of the summer, the daughter of Heyla and Louis of Male, a beautiful girl of six, called Johanna, fell ill with the sickness. She was immediately isolated, but died three days later. Nobody knew how she might have caught the sickness. Maybe God had ordained she would have to die.

At Westdorp, John de Hert, sixty-four years of age, the very best friend of Gillis Vresele and only a few years younger than Gillis, began to cough one day and died four days later. With him died his granddaughter Beatrise, the girl of Clais de Hert and Alise van Lake. These were the victims of our isolation, which perforce could not be perfect for we had to eat and take in the necessities of life.

At Old Terhagen, my dear friend and steward and mentor, then partner, Geert van Dorp died in my arms. He thanked me for having had a good life at Old Terhagen. I cried like a child when Geert died.

I cried more when my own girl, young Selie, fell ill. Selie, six years then, had always been a frail child, pale and meagre. Quintine and I feared the most for her from the beginning, and our fears were realised. As soon as Selie started coughing, in the month of September of 1361, we looked at each other, and brought her immediately to the boathouse. Quintine, courageous Quintine, did not cry once. We stayed with our child until she died, four days later. Our Selie fought the sickness so hard, but she too succumbed. We had no priest, so I said prayers to Selie before she died. I dare not to blaspheme, but I refuse to comprehend why God did not succour the innocent children that died in that ominous year of 1361. I would have preferred

to die instead of little Selie. Quintine did not let one pearl of tears in her eyes while we kept Selie clean and eased her wounds, but when Selie's heartbeat stopped, peacefully, slowly, not in pain anymore, Quintine also broke down. I buried my child near the garden in the cemetery of the castle, hoping one day to be buried near her. It is a sad world in which fathers have to bury their daughters! Her tomb has never remained without flowers ever since. Quintine and I returned to new Terhagen two weeks later.

These were the deaths we suffered in our domains. We mourned our deaths, and were grateful we lost not more dear lives.

It started to freeze early in the winter of 1361, in late October, and then I could not hold back the two Boudins and Clais from returning to Ghent, to their businesses. I felt confident I could not be hurt by the sickness, so I rode with them to the city. The four of us rode together over Zelzate to Ghent. We avoided towns and villages on the road. When we rode at a canter in the first streets of Ghent, riding on to the quays of the Leie, we made a short trip through the *kuipe*. We wanted to have a first look at the magnificent buildings we had not set eyes upon for almost a year. We rode in silence and noticed the desolation everywhere, in each street we rode into. Ghent was a dead city! The people went in silence, no joy at all in their eyes. They looked emaciated, starved and gloomy. Food distribution must have been severely disrupted. The streets stank even more than before. It was forbidden in Ghent to empty chamber pots in the streets, and also to throw kitchen garbage outside the houses, but now we saw those lying about in the most populated streets, piling up in the gutters and next to the houses. Ghent had used men to shovel and rake these together when the rule had occasionally been broken, and to carry the heaps away in dump carts, but now such men could probably not be found anymore. The service should be re-installed quickly, we thought. We saw half of the houses in certain streets unoccupied, deserted, left dirty and smelling foully. So many people had died once more in Ghent!

Boudin Vresele rode to his father's house in the *Kalanderberg*, to assess damage there among the servants of his father. He wondered what state his house was in.

Boudin van Lake rode to the van Lake family house in the nearby *Brabantstraat*, and Clais de Hert returned to the *Betsgravenbrug* to see what remained of his offices, of his shipyard and his boats. He wanted to start his ships sailing again.

I had promised John de Smet to have a look in the *Veldstraat*. His house still stood, but it had been broken in. John had left nothing of value in the house, but everybody knew it was the home of a goldsmith. I repaired like I could the wooden panels that had been smashed, closed the house as best I could. The smithy in the Saint Veerle Square, still a property of the de Smet family, was in good working order. A young smith who worked for the de Smets had kept the smithy working all through the plague! We talked. He had been a lively, enthusiastic young man before, now he was a surly man, who had lost his father and mother, his wife and two of his three children in the sickness. He began telling me his story, but had to stop halfway, for the emotions overwhelmed him. I remained standing before the man, ashamed so many of our Pharaïldis families had survived. I told him I too had lost a daughter, and understood his pain.

'No,' he cried, 'you don't understand my pain! You rich people, you survive, and we, the poor, we die. Where is justice in that? Did God allow this to happen? Is there a different God for the rich than for the poor?'

I stepped back, in fear of his hatred. The plague had done more to Ghent than merely kill people! Wounds had also been torn in people's minds.

Later still, I rode on, back to the *Brabanddam*, to the house of the Denouts. The house had not been broken in, but very many houses of that street had been abandoned. Shops were still

open, and a few weavers were back at work, fullers' clay lay in piles in front of the fullers' rooms. The humming and rattle of the looms was not half of what I had heard before in this neighbourhood of weavers and fullers, but the weavers were back at work. Ghent had been severely chastised, but it would survive.

I rode then to the *Fremineuren* Abbey, to visit Evrard Vresele. When I announced my visit and also asked to pass the night at the abbey, Evrard ran to me as fast as he could. We embraced. I could give him the first news of Terhagen, of Beoostenblijje and Westdorp, out of hand. We talked until the middle of the night, until I fell asleep with my head on the table from sheer exhaustion. Evrard smiled, and led me to a visitors' cell. In the morning, we continued talking.

It was at least two months too early to return to Ghent with the families, Evrard told. The plague was spent, but continued to claim souls. Evrard told me how very terribly the plague had raged in Ghent. Evrard's hair had become totally white in that one year. He estimated the city of Ghent had given refuge to sixty-five thousand people or so in 1340, had lost fifteen thousand in the first plague wave, and had lost an additional ten thousand in this year of 1361. He estimated that despite the births of the last ten years, Ghent had diminished by about one-third of its population in ten years. He thought less than forty-thousand people still lived in Ghent.

'The population may well still go down instead of grow in the next ten years,' he said sourly, 'for so many children have died. Ten to fifteen years from now, these should have grown up and added children of their own to the population. That is not going to happen! Despite that fact, I also see people coming back to the city. The countryside south of Ghent, and especially large territories of France, the newcomers tell me, are lying in ruins. They tell me of so many villages destroyed in France, churches burnt, of so many fields deserted, castles abandoned, there is only misery and desolation to be found in Picardy, Artois, the Thiérache, the Champagne even. Yes, our world has been scourged for the second time. I have the greatest hope in men like you, in the Boudins and Clais. Only you can bring us new hope and set us going again. You must confer now, discuss about what has to be done. You must talk to the Boudins and to Clais, Jehan, for they have to go and meet with the aldermen, urge them to action. It is no time to mourn, but time to start building up again. I'm afraid most of our aldermen are desperate too and have dropped their arms. The only man who is still working like a madman in the city administration, is Heinric! New energy is what we need! Uplifted heads, not head bowed, and hands that work!'

'Not me, Evrard,' I refused. 'I have to go back to my lands, to my farms and to the work in our polders. The Boudins and Clais are here! I rode with them to Ghent! You go and tell them, and call them to meet about what there is to do in Ghent. I have to take care of the families near Axel!'

Evrard was extremely glad his friends and family had arrived, and were back in Ghent. Yet another generation of Pharaïldis men would take command. We were ready to take on the work of Gillis Vresele and John de Hert. Evrard might become one of our patriarchs, but I, the Boudins and Clais, would now feed and lead the Pharaïldis consortium.

I stayed only two days in Ghent, and then returned to New Terhagen. I urged everybody to stay inside for some time yet, if possible until the end of the year. I had already begun inspecting my lands by then, and at the end of the winter, the families could visit their friends in Ghent. The women and children only returned to the city in January of 1362. I warned them about the desolation in the city, but a true *Gentenaar* always wants to return to his or her city! And then, we went back to work.

## The Fire in Ghent

The Treaty of Brétigny secured the peace in the kingdoms of France and England, and also in Flanders, for the next years. The hope was great peace had been finally won for all eras to come. Flanders recovered slowly and painstakingly from the plague in the years after 1361, though many beliefs were shattered, fundamental beliefs, which hung as certainties around the men and women, such as the belief in the benevolent care of God for his children. The people did not know anymore whether God really wanted them to be saved, or whether God answered their prayers, even their prayers for very good causes.

The Pharaïldis men, always rational men, working together in their consortium, did not much bother with such matters. They relied on themselves, on their hands and on their brains, and they prayed God only when they had something to give to the divine. They had their reserves intact, and now used them to increase their trade initiatives and their expansion in the county at a high pace. They had to be quick, for huge profits could be made right after the plague outbreak. They bought lands that had been left without an owner after the passage of the sickness, now called by the name of the Children's Plague. Many orphans had been made, and lands and houses had to be sold to pay for their upkeep. We bought many of the best houses of Ghent, also some of the stenen, and restored them to better, more comfortable places.

The plague had also scourged England. King Edward III remained in his country, staging splendid tournaments and banquets, evening dances and hunting parties, proving with these the plague would not be able to bring down the kingdom nor the institution of the kings and earls, and also proving his authority remained in command. Edward embarked on an ambitious program of restoring, innovating and building of royal castles. His worries nevertheless never ended!

In March of 1361 he sent his son, Lionel of Antwerp, to suppress revolts in Ireland. Lionel had been given the earldom of Ireland by his father, but he had a very hard time on the green island. He could never fully recover Ireland for the English.

The plague made victims around King Edward III. His very best friend, the duke of Lancaster died. In September, his youngest daughter Margaret and his other daughter Mary fell victim to the sickness. Mary and Margaret had been wedded only recently, Mary to the heir of Brittany, John de Montfort. Duke John of Montfort returned from captivity in France to his lands of Brittany only in 1362.

In that year of 1362, Edward III appointed Lionel to duke of Clarence and his other son Edmund to earl of Cambridge. Edward gave the title of duke of Lancaster to his son, John of Gaunt. John had married Lancaster's daughter, Blanche. John of Gaunt became suddenly a very rich man in England, as he inherited not only the title but also the huge estates of the former duke of Lancaster.

As peace had been restored, Edward III also allowed his son Edward, the prince of Wales, to marry his love, without political considerations. The heir Edward married Joan, the Fair Maid of Kent, erstwhile countess of Salisbury and then married to Sir Thomas Holland who had died of the plague in 1360. Joan was thirty-three years of age and had already given birth to five children. Her honour was not undisputed, but the prince of Wales was deeply in love with her, desired her, and obtained her hand in wedding from his father, the king. The wedding took place in October of 1361.

King Edward III did not have to wage war continually a war in France anymore. He could take more interest in his own kingdom. He supported, and had the English parliament vote for a new Statute of Pleading. Henceforth, the English language could be used in the proceedings and pleadings of the courts of justice, Latin was to be used only for the records. Previously, in the spring of 1361, Edward had already installed four Justices of the Peace in each county of England.

King Edward also signed an alliance with King Pedro of Castile, although this alliance could drag him once more into a war. He was growing old, feeble and sick. His health was suffering, but he continued to be present at this tournaments and banquets, and he still hunted on horseback.

The transfer of the lands of the continent promised by France to the crown of England began during the plague years after Brétigny, and lasted into the spring of 1362. By October of 1361, two-thirds of the ransom for King John II had been paid, so Edward III allowed John to sail to France.

In June of 1363, Prince Edward travelled with his wife Joan to Gascony, to take possession of his fief, the duchy of Aquitaine. Prince Edward ruled in Guyenne and in Gascony without asking the advice of the Gascon lords, augmenting also the taxes on the lands. The Gascon lords began to grumble and to look to the north, to the French king.

In France, the country continued to suffer from the mercenary companies, which had grown and conglomerated into real armies. One of these lords had even marched on Avignon, on the papal city, in 1361, to demand a large ransom from Pope Innocent VI. The commander of this White Company, Sir John Hawkwood, would later offer his services to the highest bidder in Italy as *condottiere*, as leader of mercenary armies. He had three thousand five hundred men on horseback and two thousand men-at-arms on foot under his command, a larger army than the dauphin of France could assemble and pay.

In 1362, the attacks and depredations of the Free Companies of mercenaries continued to ravage France, and despite counter-attacks of certain French lords, the mercenaries' power could not be suppressed. Larger and well-organised armies capable of long campaigns, of staying much longer in the field, were needed than for instance the counts of Marche or Tancarville could gather to oppose the mercenaries, and the French lords needed better commanders.

In April of 1362, barely one year after King John II of France had returned to Paris, he left for Avignon, to the papal state, no doubt to pray there in the pope's churches for better times for his kingdom, and for the relief from further waves of the plague, but primarily because he wanted to marry Joanna, Queen of Naples and countess of the Provence. John II coveted the beautiful and wealthy Provence region with its numerous Mediterranean ports, to add them to his royal domains. The urge to expand their domains remained strong in the mind of each French king. In September of 1362, however, Pope Innocent VI died, and as his successor was once more chosen a Frenchman, Guillaume de Grimoard, who took the name of Urban V. Although he was French, the new Pope Urban regarded the absorption of the Provence territories around and south of Avignon as a serious threat to his independence from the French kings. Urban V disapproved of the marriage of John II with the countess of Provence. John II could not lay his hands on the countess's fortune.

Worst was then to come, for King John II was unable in November of 1362 to pay the rest of his ransom. When somewhat later, in July of 1363, his son and hostage to Edward III, the

duke of Anjou, fled from captivity in England, which was considered a felony against the honour of the crown of France, the ransom still left unpaid, King John II could do nothing else but return to England, back into captivity, as honour demanded.

King John II returned to England in January of 1364. He died on the eighth of April of that same year in the Savoy Palace of London. John II had not yet formally renounced to the territories granted to Edward III by the Peace Treaty of Brétigny, but the lands had been transferred to England.

The new king of France became the pious, thin, frail, but tenacious Dauphin Charles, the King Charles V of Valois, soon to be called the Wise.

While this happened, King Charles de Navarre remembered of course his claims on the kingdom. He wanted the duchy of Burgundy as reward for renouncing to the throne, but John II had already given the duchy to his son, Philip the Bold. Charles de Navarre gathered an army of men-at-arms of Normandy reinforced with mercenaries, but he was defeated by a French army, his men routed at Cocherel in May of 1364.

The peace between France and England had been concluded at Brétigny, but the war in Brittany had lingered on. The English war lords Sir John Chandos and Sir Hugh Calvelly defeated an army of Charles de Blois at Auray. In September of 1364, the English warlords killed Charles de Blois at Auray. John de Montfort was on the winning hand in Brittany, and Charles V persuaded the widow of Blois, the other pretender to the heir of Brittany, to yield her claim and so to ensure the end of the war for Brittany.

Charles V was then the undisputed king of France. As a sign of goodwill, John de Montfort, duke of Brittany and now the only heir to this duchy, recognising he had better make peace on the continent, knowing King Edward III ill and less and less belligerent, the English troops in Brittany ever diminishing, paid homage to Charles V. With the Montfort reconciled with France, the peace was established in Brittany, and the English troops could return home.

In 1365, also King Charles de Navarre had to yield to the same logic. He surrendered his lands near Paris to the king. From then on, Charles de Navarre withdrew to the shadows of his castles and manors of Normandy and would not form a danger anymore for the kings of France.

King Charles V of France was firmly in command, and at peace with his dangerous neighbours. His issues with Charles of Navarre, with the insurrections in Paris led by Etienne Marcel, with the war against the England of Edward III, with the war of succession in Brittany, had been arranged. His only remaining issue were the mercenary Free Companies, which continued to terrorise, pillage and devastate his lands.

The mercenary armies continued to defeat French regular armies. In 1363, the army of the duke of Bourbon was defeated by the white companies of the Archpriest Arnan de Cersole, who was much more bandit than priest. Pope Urban V excommunicated the leaders and men of the companies, but they continued looting the richer territories of France, such as the Champagne and Burgundy in the east, Normandy in the west, and even parts of the Languedoc in the southwest.

New taxes had been imposed in the royal domains, so King Charles had more money at his disposal to hire troops. But Charles V did not hire troops to attack the men of the Free companies! He hired the mercenaries of the Free Companies instead, and he threw them in a war which might well exhaust them. The mercenaries could be spent and killed in great numbers, which would rid France of their misdeeds. Charles V had exactly the right man to lead them in a nobleman called Bertrand du Guesclin, a man as coarse as the company men.

Du Guesclin was a Breton and a man who had himself been a leader of the Free Companies for a while. Charles V hired du Guesclin and the mercenaries for the war of succession in Castile.

Two pretenders vied for the throne of Castile, King Pedro the Cruel and his half-brother Henry of Trastámara. Henry, Enrique in Spanish, asked Charles V to help him against his half-brother. Pedro the Cruel was supported by the English. He had murdered his wife, who was also a sister of the queen of France, so he was not popular at the French court. He was also an enemy of the pope.

By the end of March 1365, Bertrand du Guesclin and Enrique de Trastámara attacked Pedro with the mercenaries of the Free Companies. Instead of marching directly to Spain, the Free Companies passed by Avignon. They presented their demands to the Holy See. The mercenaries wanted much money from the pope, and also absolution for their crimes. Pope Urban V, fearing the mercenaries would destroy his castle, palace and town, absolved them indeed, and handed them the money they demanded. The mercenaries marched on to the southwest of France. They had swift success in their war, for King Pedro had to flee to Bordeaux, and Enrique could be crowned. In Bordeaux, Pedro sought the support of the prince of Wales. The Free Companies, after the easy victory, returned to France, to continue their pillaging.

A second scheme to occupy the mercenaries was then devised by Charles V's advisors. The mercenaries would launch a campaign from out of France to the Alsace region, against the Hapsburg rulers. The Alsace army offered much resistance, however, and the mercenaries turned back. They would soon again be employed by the crown of France in Spain.

In the year of 1365 happened a few other minor events.

That year, in Bordeaux, was born the son of the prince of Wales, the grandson of Edward III. The child was also given the name of Edward.

Princess Isabella of England, daughter of Edward III, once promised in marriage to Count Louis of Male, married Sir Enguerrand de Coucy, a French nobleman from Picardy, who had been given in hostage to England for the release from captivity and the payment of the ransom of King John II. Picardy had still been ravaged by the war and by the Free Companies.

\*\*\*\*\*

In Flanders, the weavers of Ghent consolidated their power in the town. The fullers, the traditional arch-enemies of the weavers for the political power in the city, were deprived of deans. The landowner-poorters also by then did not form a guild of their own anymore, but were incorporated partly into the weavers' guild, partly into the small guilds. Most of these men were cloth merchants, of course.

Count Louis of Male was distraught. His magnificent dreams with Burgundy seemed to lay shattered at his feet. On the twenty-first of November 1361, only fifteen years old, died Duke Philip de Rouvre of Burgundy, a victim of the plague. The marriage between Margaret of Male and Philip had not been consummated. There was some hesitation at the court of France as to who should inherit Burgundy, for Philip had left no heir. King John II took the duchy for himself.

Count Louis of Male might have been called to follow up on Philip de Rouvre, or even on Philip de Rouvre's mother, but she died in 1363. The French King John II finally granted Burgundy in 1363 to his son Philip the Bold, who would also receive Artois and the France-

Comté. Louis of Male saw his direct ambitions thwarted, also on Artois, which had been part of Flanders a long time ago and which he still claimed.

Louis did not dump his ambitions with Burgundy, however. He went about in devious ways. He proposed his daughter Margaret first to Edmund, earl of Cambridge, and son of King Edward III of England. Edward III was enthusiastic about the project. He promised the counties of Ponthieu, Guines, plus the important harbour of Calais to Louis of Male. A year earlier Edward had transferred the wool staple, which was so important to Flanders, to this town of Calais, closer to Flanders. King Edward III also promised Count Louis support in the conquest of Brabant.

By that time, King John II had died, to be replaced by the Dauphin Charles as king of France. Charles V could not allow a new alliance between Flanders and England to be in the making, and certainly not the passage of Flanders into English dominance by marriage. Charles V forced Pope Urban V to refuse the necessary dispensations for the marriage between Margaret of Male and Edmund of Cambridge, because there was a fourth degree of parentage between Margaret and Edmund, whereas the church only admitted the seventh degree. Louis of Male smiled when he heard of Charles's intrigues with the pope, for he had expected it, and knew now for sure how strongly Charles V wanted another marriage for Margaret! Charles wanted to propose his brother, Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, to marry Margaret and thus draw Flanders solidly into the French alliance. Count Louis of Male's ambitious dream for Burgundy and Flanders might yet be realised! When Louis of Male had a particular idea in his head, he pursued that vision fully! He agreed with magnanimity to the French proposal of a French marriage for his daughter, but not to any marriage! Overtures were begun to arrange for the marriage between Margaret and Philip the Bold.

In Ghent, the prices of grain rose again, as the population, despite the fear of Evrard Vresele, increased rapidly after the last plague. I, Jehan Terhagen, did not complain, for also the prices of land rose, increasing considerably the value of my possessions. By then, in the year 1365, I had gathered enough land and concentrated on drying out the polders, turning them into fertile fields, which brought in handsome profits with the rising grain prices. I perfected the management of the farms.

\*\*\*\*\*

In November of 1365, I, Jehan Terhagen, had returned to my domains around Provins. I tried each year to spend at least two months at Provins and at Vitry, either in one voyage or in two, to inspect my possessions in France. When Quintine travelled with me, I preferred to travel twice in the year; when she wished to remain at New Terhagen or in Ghent, I travelled only once and stayed longer. Quintine liked travelling with me to the Champagne. She liked the soft, dry climate and the gentle landscapes, and had made friends with the merchants of Provins and with the noblemen who lived near our lands.

I had good luck with my steward in France. The man had proven to be efficient, and as honest as I could notice. He showed me in a thick book of paper the expenses he had made for what purpose, discussed the figures and the items openly with me, and he brought in handsome profits. I paid him handsomely too, and paid him much more when I thought him honest and reliable, which he appreciated, and for which he was surprised. He would have continued to serve me, he said, without the increased money. I even proposed him to come and live in one of my manors, a house I would never use for as long as I lived, but which was a fine new home for him and his family. I tested the man's honesty several times and found him never at

fault. Nevertheless, I still inspected thoroughly, to not tempt the man by sloppiness. I did not want to show him I might be a negligent fool. His family had been struck by the sickness too, but they recovered all. I told him of the observations of William van Lake, doctor of Montpellier, to which he and his wife listened with much attention.

I began to like Provins too, and in particular also a castle my grandfather had owned near the town of Troyes. I liked the excellent wine of the Champagne region, the kind people, the fine, sweet climate, the soft winters, and the marvellous way the Champenois women cooked. I found the people generally nice, polite and jovial.

This time, I travelled alone. Quintine was visiting her father Pieter, now sixty-two years old, and her mother who was Kerstin de Hert, fifty-six. Her father had been ailing lately, maybe as a result of the two waves of the plague. Quintine thought her parents would cheer up, seeing her daughter happy and joyous. What follows is what Kerstin de Hert told me.

On the fifth's day of Quintine's stay in the house of the *Brabantdam*, in the house of the Denout family of erstwhile fullers, Kerstin woke in the middle of the night from the noise in the street. She did not react at first, thinking some drunken hoodlums in the street were quarrelling over money or a girl, and shouting out loud. Kerstin noticed how an unusual, flickering light showed on the ceiling of her room. She smelled smoke, and when she looked directly at the window, the light seemed unnaturally blurred, veiled. Kerstin had been torn from her sleep, her eyes felt heavy, her reactions were slower than during the day, and she wanted ardently to sleep some more, so she did not get out of her bed at once. She felt her limbs strangely heavy, too. Her husband lay very still next to her in the bed, which also surprised Kerstin, for Pieter snored like a well-oiled loom when he was deep asleep. Kerstin could not quite explain why a sudden panic gripped at her heart. Maybe it was her indomitable energy to control whatever was going on in her house that alerted her, and she knew by instinct something definitely was not right. She got up, went to the paned window, and saw indeed many people in the street, but not at all hoodlums she didn't know. Her neighbours ran down below, many in panic, and Kerstin could distinguish them quite well in the middle of the night, in the glow of a changing, orange glow that danced over the cobblestones. Kerstin then accepted the logical fact a fire was raging in her street!

Kerstin should have noticed smoke had drifted into the bedroom, but that realisation came only later. She drew open the window, and in doing that, flames blew suddenly in from through all the small openings around the door of the bedroom, and then much blacker smoke was sucked in. Kerstin gasped for breath, completely in panic, looking out of the window and realising she had been breathing foul smoke for some time. She ran to the bed, shook her husband, but Pieter did not move. She ran back to the window, shouted for help in panic, hung half out of the window to be able to breathe well, and she saw huge flames eating at the roof of her house and at the roof of the two houses on either side. Ten paces further, towards the Scheldt bridge, towards the *Braembrug*, was a deep well where the people who lived in the street took their water. Kerstin saw how her neighbours ran with buckets to the well and back, and threw water against the façades of the houses in the *Brabantdam*. Yes, the *Brabantdam* was on fire at the side of the Denout houses!

Kerstin ran back to her husband, shook Pieter, shouting he should wake up. Finally, as Pieter refused to move, she drew him with extraordinary force out of the bed, a force one only had when one was utterly desperate. Pieter still didn't react. More black smoke entered the room. Kerstin coughed, could almost not breathe anymore, felt her head hurt. She slid to the ground,

her legs refused service, but she crawled on hands and knees back to the window, leaning out of it to gasp for air. Black smoke belched out of the room, out to the air, next to Kerstin.

Kerstin's neighbour was also a master fuller, a very strong, tall man, who stood right below her window, gesticulating with his arms to her. The man's wife stood next to him. They called out to Kerstin to jump, promising to catch her. Kerstin cried her husband was still in the room, but he didn't move and couldn't hear her. She shouted she could not leave Pieter. Jump, jump, the man and his wife continued to shout, you cannot save your husband anymore. Jump! Kerstin tried to get back into the room to draw Pieter nearer to the window, but she couldn't reach him. The smoke had filled the room, and she couldn't breathe.

The window of the bedroom was small, but Kerstin succeeded in pushing her feet through, then her lower body. She hung with her arms above her, grasping the wooden frame, above the street. Kerstin curved her back so much she hurt. She thought for a few moments that lasted an eternity she was stuck in the window frame, but then she felt her body move downwards, and slide through the window by its weight. Kerstin fell through the window. The second floor of the Denout house was not high above the street, the rooms of the fullers' house were low, but Kerstin would nevertheless fall ten feet or so, and below stood only her neighbour and his wife, arms open, ready to catch her. Kerstin slid out of the window, legs and back first, then let herself go. She fell all the way, crying out in fear of death. Two more men had seen her come down slowly. Kerstin gripped still the window sill with her hands to fall less rapidly, and she half turned while going down. Strong hands caught her when she came down, but she nevertheless hit the ground hard and badly with her legs, damped the shock on her spine by her knees, which snapped. Kerstin was not a fat woman, but she was also not a thin maiden! She was a heavy woman at her age. The strong hands did grab her body and prevented her from breaking her back and head on the hard stones of the street.

When the men, who had been hurt too, caught her in their arms and bent under the weight, Kerstin was saved, but she had broken both her knees, from which she would never recover. She would live, though, and kept on crying, calling out for Pieter, her husband. Kerstin had jumped in time. Not only did black smoke billow out of all the window of the Denout house, but also ugly, red, licking flames. No, Pieter could not be saved. He might have been dead already, stifled by the first smoke, for Pieter had already had difficulty breathing normally the last years. He might have lost conscience when Kerstin had shaken him. The flames filled the upper room, now. Kerstin wailed her husband's name, but then, while she was lying on the cobbles, at some distance from the flaming houses, a new fear gripped her heart.

Quintine, her daughter Quintine, where was Quintine? Her neighbour's wife stood still near Kerstin, so Kerstin looked at her with the saddest eyes she could show, imploring the woman to go and see whether Quintine had left the house. The woman shook her head. Quintine might have escaped behind the houses, but not into the *Brabantdam*! The woman knew Quintine was in the house. She wept. She knew Quintine well, for Quintine and her twin sister had run often into her house when they were young. No, Quintine had not escaped from the house, the neighbour feared. Nobody but Kerstin had been saved from the Denout house! Luckily, Kerstin's two servants did not sleep here. Quintine slept in a room behind. No, she could not have escaped! Maybe at the other side?

The fire had not started above. It had started downstairs, in a room on the ground floor next to the Denout house. Had somebody forgotten to extinguish a candle in the house next doors? Three houses stood on fire. The thatched roofs were belching black, foully smelling smoke

and flames. Flames licked at the other straw roofs. The entire *Brabantdam* could go up in flames! People from the *Brabantdam*, and also men and women from nearby streets, ran with buckets of water, then began to form a human chain, but what use was a bucket of water when the fire spread above and was so much more terribly powerful? The men cursed, the women cried, and bucket after bucket of water was swung and emptied against the fronts of the houses. Men had fetched ladders and were now also throwing buckets of water over the roofs. Little, very little could be done to quench the flames! Kerstin de Hert cried out her desperation to the fire-red sky. Her fair Quintine! Her smart, beautiful girl! Where was Quintine? Blissfully, Kerstin de Hert fainted. She did not feel how her neighbours took her up, placed her in a handcart, and brought her so to the Bijloke convent.

I, Jehan Terhagen, rode happily and light-headed into Ghent one week later, glad to be in my home city again, and eager to hold Quintine in my arms. I had missed her much on this voyage. When I arrived in the *Brabantdam*, I saw instantly a great accident had happened. I rode into the long street, coming from the *Waalpoort* over the Scheldt, past the weavers' chapel and over the *Braembrug*. I smelled ashes and wood burnt to cinders as soon as I passed the *Braembrug*!

More than a third of the *Brabantdam* lay in burned ruins, more than twenty houses on one side of the street, from a little farther than the *Braembrug* on, and even a few houses on the other side had been destroyed by the fire. I was gripped by fear when I saw the destruction that had happened here. Poor people! Damn Ghent still had not efficiently solved the issue of the thatched roofs! Fires broke out regularly! All houses of Ghent should have slate or tiled roofs, I cursed.

I rode up to the Denout house, seeing only the charred remains of Quintine's home. The roofs of the houses had burnt, collapsed, and all the other beams consumed by the fire. The fronts of the houses still stood, but ready to fall into the street. I noticed the wooden beams inside, broken and black, were still smouldering.

I looked around me. Where were Pieter, Kerstin and Quintine? I sought eyes that might answer my silent plea, my desperate glances. One man, a sturdy fuller, who was pushing a cart into the street filled with charred beams, stopped when he saw me on my horse, looking at the desolation of the houses.

'I know you,' the man said spontaneously. 'You are the husband of one of the Denout daughters, aren't you?'

'I am indeed,' I replied. 'Can you tell me, please, what happened here? Do you know where my father-in-law is?'

'A great tragedy is what happened here,' the man said, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

'My house, on the other side, burnt down too. The fire started in the house next to the Denout complex. The fool of a fuller there, left the fire on under one of his basins, and the fire caught in the draft at a pile of small wood a little farther. He made poor people out of us all. Kerstin jumped out of a window. We caught her, but she fell heavily. She is in the Bijloke convent. I and my wife brought her there. She is still in the Bijloke!'

'Where is Pieter Denout and his daughter?'

The man shook his head and astonishingly, for such a strong man, he began to cry. Had members of his family perished in the ordeal? I didn't think I could pry more information out of him, so I thanked him and rode as fast as I could to the Bijloke.

At the convent, I asked to see Kerstin de Hert, wife of Pieter Denout. A nun brought me to the hall of the sick. One bed stood next to the other in that hall, all very clean, white sheets on them, in the cool room. The nun brought me to a bed in which lay Kerstin de Hert, but Kerstin

had seen me coming, she shouted out my name from far, opened her arms for me and began to cry, to weep very loudly.

I took her hand and asked, ‘Mother Kerstin, please, tell me, where are Pieter and Quintine? Are they all right?’

‘Dead!’ Kerstin gasped, between tears and cries, ‘dead! They are dead! They could not be saved from the fire! I tried to move Pieter, Jehan, I did try, but couldn’t, and Quintine must have choked from the smoke and died in her sleep! It is a consolation to believe she did not feel any pain. Quintine and Pieter are dead, Jehan! Oh sweet Christ, my beautiful daughter, my kind, courageous husband, they are all dead!’

Kerstin grasped my hand, bowed her head to me and whispered, ‘you loved Quintine, didn’t you? And Quintine loved you, with a love stronger than her sister could have loved you! Is that not the truth? I know you liked Wivine too, and probably still do. I know Wivine could not have children anymore. The children are Quintine’s children, aren’t they? It is such a consolation to me, you know, to still have the children of Quintine. I loved both my daughters. I am so proud, so glad Quintine knew what love meant! You are a good man, Jehan Terhagen, take good care of Quintine’s children! Don’t forget the children!’

I nodded.

I did not cry in front of Kerstin. It took a few moments before she could talk about what had happened. After her story, she said Martin and Avezoete had been warned, had come to Ghent immediately, and had buried the remains of their father and sister. I would not see Quintine again, never! Quintine had perished in the fire of the *Brabantdam*.

I stayed a long time that day at the bed of Kerstin de Hert, my mother-in-law. She had broken both her legs, her knees had been shattered. Kerstin would not walk again. Avezoete, her daughter-in-law, lived now in the van Lake house, a little farther than the *Brabantdam*, in the *Brabantstraat*. Avezoete would take Kerstin to Westdorp Manor, to the better air of the countryside, to live with her son Martin. Martin had already told Wivine what had happened. Wivine had been at the funeral with her two children. Pieter and Quintine were buried next to each other in the cemetery of Saint John’s. Kerstin cried, for she had not been able to attend to the ceremony. She had not seen the coffin of her husband be given to the earth of Ghent.

I tried to console Kerstin as best as I could, telling her how much she still had, a rather futile exercise, for Kerstin was as intelligent as anybody else of the Pharaïldis families, and she knew sufficiently what she had lost and what she had retained. How can you console a fine woman for the loss of her husband and her daughter, the husband who was her protector and lover, the daughter her joy? Kerstin would have to spend the rest of her life in a chair, depending on the charity of her daughter-in-law. Avezoete was a very nice, well-educated woman, who had received her share of bad tidings, but Kerstin would hate it to have somebody care for her, and not she for them!

I said goodbye to Kerstin, and rode to the *Brabantstraat*, to find the van Lakes, and especially Avezoete.

Boudin van Lake was the master of the weavers’ house now, and he was in. He used the complex of houses of the van Lakes partly as his offices. Messengers arrived and ran or rode off. We talked a while, and then I met Avezoete, who said she would take care of Kerstin. Martin was at Westdorp Manor, managing our farms and lands. Avezoete told me Martin wanted to rebuild the Denout home, but Kerstin would have to be brought to Westdorp, for that was where Avezoete wanted to live with her children, who were now being cared for by Wivine. Avezoete had spoken to the doctors of the Bijloke. No, Kerstin would not walk again.

Her knees had been broken, and did not heal too well. There was only a slight hope that Kerstin would ever be walking again. The doctors doubted the outcome.

I rode back to Terhagen, but I could not immediately ride into my castle. I had not shed a tear until then for Quintine. I had to show I was a hard, imperturbable man to the people of Ghent. I rode to the boathouse, where Quintine and I had conquered the first wave of the plague, had been sick and had recovered. It was there we had loved each other so deeply we had remained inseparable ever after, even though Quintine had to travel to Rome, to far away from Ghent, to grasp fully how we two were the same body and soul. When I arrived near the boathouse, I made my horse gallop as fast as it could, and as the strong wind blew around me, I abandoned my mind to grief and sadness.

At the boathouse, I jumped off my horse, did not even unsaddle the animal but let it eat the grass around, and entered the small building. I threw open the gate of the boathouse, the gate that opened at the rear to the vast expanse of water. I looked out, over the black, oily surface. The water was tempting me! If Quintine and I were one soul, should we then not be united? I could not bear not to be with Quintine anymore.

Why had God not taken me, instead of her? Our love had been above human comprehension, the strength of feelings such as the gods might have been jealous of. Yes, much about us was wrong. Even as we lived as a married couple, we were not. We lived in adultery, in shame, as deadly sinners in the eyes of men and God. Yet we loved, how much we loved! Not once did we quarrel seriously about something important, never had we said ugly words to each other, words we might have regretted afterwards.

I had an awful taste of too many things left unfulfilled in my life! I should have married my love, I should never have left Quintine alone, I should have protected her, I should have been with her in the Denout house, I should have shown the world it was her I loved. Had God taken Quintine because we sinned? Had God solved the problem his own way, by grabbing Quintine, the object of the illicit love, away from me? Or was I thinking of God as being responsible because it would be unbearable for me to accept my grand Quintine had died merely by a random, stupid accident of pure chance. Was getting God in the picture only a way of lending an epic, grand reason and excuse for an incomprehensible, sad but banal coincidence? Why Quintine, and why not me? I had a terrible feeling of unjust loss. Had it not all been my fault? Why had Quintine died, where was the sense and the justice in all of what happened to us? What should I do now, what could still give sense to my life?

I thought of the children. Young Kerstin resembled Quintine so much! I was so lucky to have Kerstin! Kerstin, more than her brother, would remind me of her mother. A mixture of bitterness and sadness filled my mind. I fell to my knees above the water, felt the moisture with one hand. The water felt cold! Quintine would have cold, deep inside the earth! Quintine's body would deteriorate. Would a more beautiful image of her dwell in the heavens? Would God have forgiven her? Yes, what I could still do for Quintine, and had to do, was to care for William and Kerstin. I should also not leave and refute Wivine. Wivine too was part of Quintine and resembled her much. Quintine would have wanted these three, my children and Wivine, to see them protected and loved and cared for, so that was now to be my aim in life. These three needed my attention, my strength, my love and care, and by them I would never forget Quintine in this life, until we might be united again in the other. By then, I was crying, sitting next to the water and the boat. The tears had welled up in my eyes and ran down my cheek. I had not wept since I was a child! The emotions of sadness, of grief, of loneliness, of terrible mourning, overwhelmed me. Yes, I would care for others, but I would

be terribly lonely. I cried out my anger at a too cruel God, and my cries swept over the water and made the birds fly away in panic.

Late in the evening, I rode back to New Terhagen. Ywen took my horse to the stables without a word. He knew. I ran up the stairs of the manor, pushed open the door panels, left them standing open, and ran into the hall, and into the arms of Wivine, who also ran up to me, my son William and my daughter Kerstin standing behind her. My children still had a mother!

### The Third Wave

We lived on after 1365, and we lived well. I, Jehan Terhagen, remained in a strange state of mind, a state I had not known before, a more languorous, sad, gloomy mood. My Quintine was dead, and I wondered why I lived on. I often thought of abandoning all the work, the pursuit of more riches, the managing of the estates, the urge to buy ever more lands, becoming ever more powerful and wealthy. I would simply ride away, leave Ghent and the Four Crafts, and go and live in sweeter Champagne, at Provins, Vitry or Troyes. I was often thus tempted to leave the once again buzzing rigmarole of Ghent and of New Terhagen, but I stayed on. One does not leave so easily one's home town, I had to recognise. I could not come to abandon my friends and the Pharaïldis families.

We spent the summer time at New Terhagen, but I drew Wivine and the children to my castle of Troyes to pass the softer winter there. We made new friends in France. Wivine and the children soon spoke as well French as they did Flemish. Wivine seemed content, was loved and respected in the Champagne. She surprised me by making more friends than I. The people from around the castle came asking her for advice, and I caught her wandering through the vineyards, discussing vines and wines with the wine growers. Wivine also received all my daily attention to her alone. I studied her face, trying to remember which traits she had in common with Quintine, and which not. The children, more than ever, were her children entirely now, and she educated them well, chastising them as well as loving them. I helped her, though I was clumsy with children and never knew exactly how to talk to them about Quintine. I tried to be with Wivine and the children much more than before.

The two Boudins, Boudin Vresele and Boudin van Lake, remained living in Ghent. Boudin van Lake lived in the *Brabantstraat*, Boudin Vresele in the *Kalanderberg*, both in their ancestral homes, not far from each other. They were now the major overseers of our fortune, our traders, brokers and merchants, and they showed each as much cunning as their fathers in their business ventures, which grew constantly. They were born traders, they did well, and they enjoyed what they did. Some of our reserve money was placed in the good custody of Wouter de Smet in the *Veldstraat*, but the largest part of our wealth was on the move, being used in trade ventures. Wouter de Smet kept his offices in his father's house in the *Veldstraat*, but John, Wouter's father, returned living at the smithy of the Saint Veerle Square. He used the opportunity to buy two houses next to his, and then he built a fine *steen* there,

transforming his own father's smithy to a magnificent house with a slated roof next to the smithy, which remained functioning.

Martin Denout and I lived as landed lords of the countryside. I was a lord both of title and of owner of lands, Martin had not yet a title, though had he asked Heyla and Count Louis of Male he might have obtained one. The count granted him the title of lord of Westdorp. When it came to managing the Pharaïldis lands, Martin now did most of the work. I merely guided him, served as his counsellor, though in name I still had authority above him. We met often to discuss our buying and sale of lands and farms, we visited each other's manor regularly, and our wives agreed happily together. We did not expand anymore to the west of the Scheldt, towards Flanders. We passed the Scheldt and bought lands in Brabant, especially between Mechelen and Antwerp.

Clais de Hert and his wife remained living in Ghent like the two Boudins, built also a *steen* in the same place as their former home. Clais's greatest sadness was the decease of his mother, Beatrise van Vaernewijc, who died of a bad fever one year after Quintine's death. Beatrise had much suffered from the death of her husband John de Hert in the second wave of the plague, and had not been entirely herself ever since. She died peacefully in November of 1366. After she died, me then looking with more attention at people, I discovered her noble, fine features in her son Clais. Clais was as well the product of his rougher father as of the refined Beatrise! Clais became the owner of a vast shipping company. He owned a fleet of sea-cogs, which sailed on southern and northern seas. With the two Boudins, he now exploited his trading and seafaring offices in La Rochelle and Bordeaux, in Copenhagen and Lübeck

We lived peacefully in Ghent and in the countryside of the Four Crafts. We were very wealthy, and as we diversified much, we reckoned not much could in the future still harm our well-being. We had our money and interests invested in so many different places and ventures, a real world catastrophe would have to happen to make us poor. Although we could rival with the richest men and landowner-poorters of Ghent, we refrained from mingling in the politics of the town. We did not propose serving as aldermen or deans, and only left Heinric Vresele to tell us occasionally of what happened in Ghent with the government, and what the latest gossips were. We usually invited Heinric also to our meetings of the Pharaïldis Councils, for he too had rights on the considerable fortune we managed. He, like us, only enjoyed few returns from that money, but he did not seem to desire more. With what we allowed ourselves directly, he could live very comfortably in Ghent.

Except for Clais de Hert, who was still officially a shipper though he had not set foot on the wooden deck of a cog for years, none of us still exercised a craft. We were traders and landowners, members of those guilds in the overall organisation of the Small Guilds. We had our deans and an upper-dean.

In the beginning of 1368, it was not Evrard Vresele, the Fremineuren monk, who warned us for an impending third wave of the plague. This time, Clais de Hert called together a meeting in Ghent, without Count Louis. Clais told us he had received news of a new general sickness arriving from the south. Clais's river-captains had told him about the sickness that scourged France once more. Clais had already stopped his transport by ships from Douai, but he kept on working on Antwerp and Bruges, emptying his warehouses. He expected he might have to stop sailing altogether by the autumn of this year of 1368 because of the sickness. The plague might this time more seriously disrupt the grain trade, so he urged us to take in provisions for the winter.

Evrard Vresele sighed. In the past, he had been proud of warning us many months in advance of the coming sickness. This time, he had received no news at all from the abbeys of his order in the south, not since eight months. He suspected many of the monks he had visited when he was young, and with whom he occasionally corresponded, had all died or were too busy handling a new crisis. Letters sent to him by the monks took also much longer to reach him, because of the dangers in travelling, from the brigands of the Free Companies. The mercenary bands still roamed in France and attacked abbeys and churches, having no respect for priests, monks, nuns and God. Evrard told us we did not realise how lucky we were to live in peaceful Flanders. Count Louis of Male had successfully fought off the groups of mercenaries that had tried to enter and plunder the territory of Flanders.

A third wave of the sickness was coming to Ghent! We deemed us very lucky to have been forewarned, but we would have little time to prepare. We did not need much time to organise our families, either, for we were used to a certain routine. We would once again isolate ourselves in our manors to the same scheme as seven years ago. The Vreseles would come and live with me at New Terhagen, the de Smets at Beostenblijje with Heyla, the van Lakes with Martin Denout at Westdorp Manor. Also the de Herts preferred to stay at Westdorp, as that was the place where Clais's mother now lived, as well as his sister-in-law. The two Boudins, Clais and Wouter, had two to three months to halt their business gracefully, prepare to close their initiatives for about a year, and then they would return to their work. Evrard Vresele would not leave his abbey, and Heinric was serving the town administration, had refused to leave his function earlier, and remained somewhat aloof from us as always. Heinric was confident he would once more live through the ordeal without being sick, as he had the two previous times. He refused to hide at New Terhagen. We immediately began to take the appropriate measures, storing more provisions than we had done for the last wave, and bringing our rooms in good and clean order to receive our guests.

The Pharaïldis families of Ghent dispersed in our country manors early, as of the end of August of 1368, and then the plague had already demanded its first victims in the outskirts of Ghent. The sickness was now called the *Black Death*, for the swellings on the bodies of the victims first grew, then darkened on the skin to black spots, probably because the blood in the bulbs coagulated and became black under the skin, before bursting out their pus. Other names were of course the Great Mortality, the Rapid Death, or in Flemish *Gaadood*, and so on. We soon realised this wave hit far worse than the two preceding ones. More people died more quickly and people who caught the sickness did not recover! The sickness was more atrocious and more painful than before.

Heinric wrote us by the end of the year the services of Ghent were totally disrupted, for too many men had died, also many, many men employed by the city. One third of the aldermen died quickly in the first months of autumn, and more than one third of the remaining aldermen escaped to the country. They were too late, the sickness caught up with them, but they still survived better than the people who had stayed in crowded Ghent.

Once more, people died in the streets, reported Evrard Vresele, but this time, they remained lying in the gutters, for no one passed to pick them up and bring them to mass burial sites. The Fremineuren monks, scared of the sickness, but with much courage, used handcarts to transport the rotting corpses to the cemeteries. Thieves passed from house to house, stole all possessions of value, and did not hesitate to violently attack also the people in the houses that were still occupied. Murders were left unpunished. The aldermen had tried to hire in more men for the White Hoods, but many dead were suffered also in this militia.

We heard of how Ghent was harassed by the sickness from the passionate, extremely gloomy letters we exchanged via our now usual place near Zelzate, letters coming from Evrard and Heinric. Heinric also wrote the van Artevelde family members had fled to the countryside, to their manors and houses there.

Especially Heinric Vresele's letters sounded terrible and very bitter when we read them aloud at New Terhagen. We thought sometimes Heinric had lost his mind. He almost wrote mystical letters, in which he mixed deep catholic feelings with simple superstition, Christian faith with the amulets and remedies of ancient pageantry. We understood. Heinric thought he should continue to offer his services to the city, but he must have lived in constant fear of falling sick, alone in Ghent, and die. Who would not lose his or her mind at so much suffering as Heinric wrote us about? Hundreds died each day, he wrote, people literally rotting away in their beds or in the street, blood oozing out of their wounds, sometimes faces unrecognisable from the wounds in their face, unable to walk on their feet because of the painful, swelling bulbs on their feet. People collapsed in the middle of the streets and were left to die without help. Others went mad of thirst, or of desperation they jumped in the Leie and the Scheldt and drowned. Since people expected to die any moment, debauchery set in. People who had lived as sober men and women now sat drunk in the taverns, all day long, leaving their children to their fate. Women laid with any men who wanted them. A few flagellants had appeared in town. Devil worshippers announced openly in the market places of Ghent the era of the devil had come, so the people started adoring the devil, for Satan had taken over the creation of God. Nobody among the clergy had the energy to condemn the heretics!

We could hardly believe it was possible for hundreds of men, women and children to die in Ghent each day. Our moods in the countryside were every low because of what happened in Ghent. We also had only lately gained back what we had lost in the second wave of the plague, and yet, now, another wave passed devastatingly over our city, making us lose what we had won. We would have to start all over again for the third time. We dared not return to Ghent, not even I, Jehan Terhagen, who had survived the sickness so many years ago and might therefore not become a victim a second time.

How could God's people live on through and after such an ordeal, still honouring God and the Saints, when so many died piteously? Did God not have pity with the innocents? Was nobody innocent in Ghent? I could not believe that! So many priests, nuns and monks had died, Evrard Vresele wrote, practically no masses could be sung anymore in the town. Doctors died faster than the men and women they tried to cure. William van Lake's observation that who had caught the sickness and had survived would not catch it a second time, remained very valid, Evrard wrote. Only the very old nuns could still care for the sick now, the other nuns had either died, run away to give their bodies over to lechery, or to throw themselves in desperation into the Leie and the Scheldt. Yes, wrote Evrard, we have started pushing a boat on the rivers and pick up the dead bodies in the waters! Never had the suffering been so immense as during this, third wave of the pestilence! Evrard worked from morning till evening with the nuns of the Bijloke and with a few monks of the Fremineuren, at the improvised hospital of the Bijloke, which had been organised but was overwhelmed by the many sick. The worse is, Evrard wrote, we can do nothing, absolutely nothing to save these poor people!

The situation was desperate too at the abbey of Ter Hage. Rows of sick people stood before the gates of the convent in the morning of the first day I arrived. I waited in fear until the queue had been absorbed in the convent, then I asked for Mother Amalberga. I was not

allowed to enter, for the sick occupied all the halls and even the nave of the abbey church. Once more, mother Amalberga and I arranged to deliver wagons of food to the nuns. Mother Amalberga asked me to deliver in the evening, for in the morning, the people at the gate would have stolen everything deposited at the gates.

The desolation in Ghent and in the smaller cities of Flanders, as in the countryside of the quarter of Ghent, was total. It was as if the great devil, Satan, had finally defeated the power of God on earth. Satan had concluded a pact with Death, who scythed among the humans of Flanders as if he were reaping in a harvest of corn. We, The Pharaïldis men, loved beauty, fine things, works of art. We applied honest and pure feelings in our acts. We felt now we had become completely impure, dirty, stained with blood, sin and death. The people in the villages and cities gave themselves over to debauchery and violence, for they thought they would all be dead so soon, convinced no prayer helped. They felt abandoned and trampled upon by God and by the angels. The devils of the universe had been poured over our county, and wallowed in the rot! This, third wave of the plague, proved the victory of everything that was vile and ugly! The four riders that had emerged from the breaking of the four seals scourged Ghent now at the same time! Had the great day of the retribution of God come to us? It was this way also Heinric Vresele regarded the world now.

We, the men and women of the Pharaïldis families, we barricaded ourselves into our manors and in the farm of Old Terhagen. We brought our hands to our ears not to hear the wailing of the world! I had reinforced once more the farm, so that it had become a fortress as impregnable as the newer castle. We closed our ears to the pleading of the people who came begging to be saved at our gates. The myth of manors free of the pestilence were told in the environs and attracted people to our places. They had to face our crossbows behind the embattlements.

Very many, also among our families, lost faith in God and Christ. What had we done wrong to deserve this scourging? Was this the predicted end of the world? Would God send us one incurable plague after the other until we fell in total anarchy, until every human being broke down, not only our bodies, but also our values, the fine beliefs we had learned from the priests and which we had accepted as true? This was the third wave we survived like on isolated boats in the endless seas, and we were all convinced that with one or two more of such waves, humanity would not exist anymore. We would soon see the riders of the Apocalypse canter on their skeletal horses, and the trumpets of the angels or of the devils would announce the end of the world. Many among us did not believe anymore God would come to judge us in splendour. Heaven did not exist anymore. Was God dead?

The only man to hold on to faith imperturbably was the monk Evrard Vresele. He wrote us time after time to have faith in God. A heavenly battle was being fought between evil and God, he wrote, but he was convinced God was goodness incarnate, and love incarnate, and God would save the pious for a better world. So we took hope, continued praying each day, shut our ears to the cries and wailings and pleadings at our gates from infected people, and loved our families.

I rode regularly out of New Terhagen, alone, not wanting and not daring to risk the lives of Ywen, Mathis and Everdey, and of their families, and thereby also our Pharaïldis families. I later realised I, Jehan Terhagen, formed the only link that held the families together. I brought each time a little hope to the other manors, and I kept us going with the words of encouragement of Evrard, helping others where I could, with the few means we could still muster. I helped much the abbey of Ter Hage.

In a sombre way, this pestilence made me feel I had a reason to live on, although my thoughts never left Quintine. I caught myself increasingly, while riding on the deserted roads of the Four Crafts, to talk out loud to Quintine, asking her what I should do next, and providing the answers myself, as if she had replied to my entreaties. When I realised I too might be losing my mind, I reacted, and returned to reason and to reality. Nevertheless, despite the reason we had ever cherished among the Pharaïldis families, we turned into harder men and women, more closed to goodness and empathy, except in the warmth of our own families. We became nervous men, short of temper, rash in making up our minds, and dangerous with the sword. We knew many thousands had died, so one or two dead men more would make no difference! When beggars tried to hang onto my horse on a road near Axel, I did not hesitate using my sword, and so did the men of Beostenblijde and of Westdorp Manor, as they later confessed to me. To ward off crying groups of people when the sick and the desperate attempted entering their domains, they did not hesitate in using their crossbows on the unarmed.

Heinric Vresele showed us by his letters he had turned into the same hardened, desperate, radical man, who now didn't know anymore in what value to believe. In his last letters, a kind of triumphal grandness appeared, another feeling altogether than in previous writings. God had spared him, he had finally understood, and some of his closest friends also, to accomplish great things. The pestilence could not touch him, for God had declared his servant Heinric to be invincible, to be victorious over everybody and everything that tried to harm him or his family. He was a chosen one! In face of the devils and their acolytes, he felt to be an avenging angel of God, whose fate was to destroy all evil men on earth. Heinric was ravening mad, I thought. His language had the contrary effect on me as he might have hoped, the same reaction as it had on the Boudins and on Clais and on Wouter the Younger. No, wrote Evrard, and no, I wrote, our values and our purer beliefs in love and goodness remained sacred. If we only continued to believe in Christ, said Evrard, in the Virgin Mary and in the Saints, our world would be saved, not destroyed entirely. We were not too convinced, however, about our thoughts and beliefs after the third wave.

Evrard Vresele regretted nobody in Ghent held accounts about how many people had died in the city, but at the end of the spring of 1369, when the plague seemed to be spent earlier than the previous one, he estimated from the deceased men and women in his neighbourhood of the Fremineuren abbey, in total more than twelve thousand people had died in the six months from the autumn of 1368 to the end of the spring of 1369. Ghent had diminished in the less than twenty years of the three waves of the plague to half its population! Barely thirty thousand people or so could still be living inside the wider walls of the city. Moreover, Evrard wrote, weavers, fullers, but also men of the other crafts, continued leaving the town. Had they also understood living in the countryside offered them better chances on survival than in the larger cities of Flanders?

The Great Mortality had arrived rather suddenly and massively in Ghent in the autumn of 1368. As abruptly it seemed to us, it faded away. Like a hungry monster that had devoured to satiation, it moved to elsewhere, and disappeared. Maybe the plague had claimed so many victims his time it had killed everybody who was weaker than those who remained. Maybe it had taken so many victims this time it had pity on us, poor humans who had lived through the suffering. Was the wave something with a conscience, with knowledge? Many people thought yes, this was the case.

By the end of the spring of 1369, before the summer arrived with really hot days, the wave stopped. This was a surprise, for we had thought the plague would go on raging all through

the summer and the autumn of 1369. By August, we, the Pharaïldis men, could crawl out of our holes and hope to live again among the humans spared. We remained dulled in our minds for still a long while, of course, but before the autumn began, we were back at work in Ghent and in our manor. Martin and I rode out, though not with a smile on our face when we noticed how many people had died in the Four Crafts and in the Land of Waas. The two Boudins, Clais and Wouter had the toughest work in Ghent.

We rejoiced for having been saved in August of 1369, esteeming us very lucky people. We had taken risks abandoning our business, but we had survived the third wave of the sickness in this century. Nevertheless, we did suffer losses in our families, but those happened only early in the next year of 1370. Kerstin de Hert went out of her mind at the horrors of the plague. Weakened by the death of her husband and having not the will to live on, she passed away at Westdorp Manor in the heart of the winter of from 1369 to 1370, in the month of January.

Our bookkeeper Nete de Hert succumbed of a sudden violent sickness, which we first thought might also be the pestilence, but she did not develop the swellings of the plague. Maybe she abandoned after having struggled to resist the sickness of the plague. She too died that winter, in the month of February.

We heard only at the end of that year 1370 also William van Lake had succumbed, he probably of a late form of the pestilence. William had asked one of his students of Montpellier, a Flemish boy of Ieper, to write us in case he would not survive. The boy did better, travelled back to Flanders, and explained what had happened to his master.

Very slowly from 1370 on, we of the Pharaïldis families, comforted by the encouragements of Evrard Vresele, threw us head long into our work, not only to consolidate our fortune, but also to win something back from the sledgehammer blow Ghent had suffered in the third wave. We were convinced one more wave of the plague would definitely destroy our city. When we rode through Ghent in 1370, richly dressed in heavy woollen cloaks lined with ermine, the desolation we witnessed was beyond our comprehension. The *kuipe* lived on, lively again, though very much diminished in numbers of people and in numbers of shops and stalls and businesses. But outside of the centre of Ghent, entire streets looked as if they had been abandoned by humans. The devastation in the more populated and poorer quarters was far greater than it had been in the *kuipe*! Heinric Vresele told us he had work to above his means trying to sort out the mess the plague had caused in the city. The town's finances were very low, most of the administration had broken down to anarchy, life organised very slowly in Ghent.

I rode back to New Terhagen. My family and the families of our guards were very happy to be able to run in the gardens, to ride outside our castle. We heard from Heyla de Smet at Beostenblijje what she had heard of Count Louis of Male about what had happened in France and England. Louis had continued to visit Heyla. He came more often now to Beostenblijje.

\*\*\*\*\*

The year of 1366 had been a quiet year in the struggle between the powers of France and England, but who had hoped some sort of peaceful equilibrium had set in, came out deceived and disappointed by 1370.

In the beginning of April of 1366, at Najera in Spain, a great battle was delivered between the armies of the kings who vied for the throne of Castile. King Pedro the Cruel, helped by

English troops, defeated his rival Enrique of Trastámara. The war lord of King Charles V of France, Bertrand du Guesclin, was even captured by the English. Du Guesclin was a fine leader for limited skirmishes, not a great leader of armies. The mercenaries of the Free Companies hired by Charles V lost their leader, and many of their men had been killed, so that Charles V came closer to his aim of eliminating them from his kingdom, but Charles would of course have preferred winning the battle. Najera convinced him even more the English could not be defeated in battle, so he continued his tactics of harassing ever the English troops, but not allowing them a battle on French territory. The battered mercenary bands returned to France, however, although in fewer numbers and without fine leaders. France had also lost a precious ally in the Castile of Enrique.

The great victor of Najera was the prince of Wales, but Edward had issues of his own. He had brought the army of Aquitaine to Spain, and he had paid for that army, but Pedro paid nothing in return to the prince. Edward had funding issues, as much as King Charles V. He had already enforced additional taxes on Gascony in the years before the battle of Najera to pay for his men, now he had to demand increased hearth taxes on his subjects of Aquitaine, which were thoroughly hated by the lords and by the people of Gascony.

In England, King Edward III had called a halt to his ambitions in France. He felt tired and sick, weak in his body. He sought comfort with a mistress, Alice Perrers, who gained much influence on him at his court, which was resented by some of his lords.

In April of 1367, Pope Urban V returned to Rome. The holy city lay still in ruins, the money of the jubilee year spent to nothing of lasting value. Rome was a city of a mere twenty thousand people, smaller than Ghent and very much smaller than it had been in Rome's ancient imperial times. In 1369, the Byzantine Emperor John V Paleologus visited Rome, urging the Pope to call on the immense military powers of the Christian continent, on the armies of the kings of France and England and of the emperor of Germany, to come to his assistance against the Islamic threat of the Turkish forces who threatened the ancient Roman Empire of the east. The pope could not rally the kings, however, and Emperor John must have realised how poor the popes of the west really were, despite much pomp of their receptions and banquets. The Emperor was not impressed by this Rome!

The popes also remained French! In September of 1370, Pope Urban V was back in Avignon, having been defeated in Italy by the troops of Bernabò Visconti of Milan. When he died shortly after, still in 1370, his successor was the Frenchman Pierre Roger de Beaufort, a pious and modest man, who chose the name of Gregory XI.

In November of 1368, while the pestilence raged, the Gascon lords rebelled against the prince of Wales. The lords conferred, and rather impulsively refused to contribute to the hearth taxes imposed by the prince of Wales. Also rather suddenly, not really knowing what their actions might head to, they asked King Charles V of France to intervene.

By the Peace Treaty of Brétigny, King Edward III of England had received full sovereignty over Aquitaine. Aquitaine was not anymore, according to that treaty, a feudal fief of France. King Charles V could by right not intervene in the conflict between the prince of Wales and his lords of the duchy. In January of 1369, however, Charles V did intervene, calling the prince of Wales to Paris to justify himself for his acts and for the hundreds of complaints in writing the king had received at his court of Paris by Gascon lords. A weary Edward, prince of Wales, answered he might well appear at the court of Charles, but then at the head of sixty thousand men-at-arms! King Edward III asked his son to forsake of the hearth taxes in Gascony, and he implored King Charles V not to start a new war. He sought peace in vain.

In May of 1369, King Charles V broke the Peace Treaty of Brétigny by declaring war on the prince of Wales. Edward was already very sick at that moment, maybe an element that had played with Charles for growing his confidence he could win a war in Aquitaine. Edward could not walk anymore, he had to travel in a litter. Charles V thus declared war to the sick, weakened prince of Wales and to England, shrewdly using the issue of sovereignty over the Aquitaine and the cause of the discontented Gascon lords. Charles V hoped these lords might now help him in defeating the English troops.

In that same year of 1369, King Pedro the Cruel of Castile was defeated in his turn by King Enrique, and this last battle proved fatal to Pedro, who was killed. Edward, prince of Wales, saw therefore all hope of ever being paid back for the huge sums he had spent in the Castilian war blown away, so the prince was sorely sitting on a huge financial loss. Again he had to introduce new taxes on his duchy of the continent.

King Charles V having declared the Peace Treaty of Brétigny void, the English parliament agreed at the beginning of June of 1369, that King Edward III should once more call himself king of France, and continue the war with France. King Edward was too spent to start campaigns in France by himself, but the war between France and England could start all over again with utmost violence!

In July of 1369, at the very end of the third plague wave, the king's son John of Gaunt arrived with an English army at Calais. King Edward III remained in England, his health declining rapidly. On the fifteenth of August of 1369, he was hit by another blow, for his wife and best, loyal support, Queen Philippa of Hainault died. The influence of Alice Perrers at the royal court of London grew, which was seen as a danger for the power of the earls of England, among them the sons of Edward III.

The war in France immediately went bad for England. All their territories on the continent were attacked by limited groups of men-at-arms of France, the French troops advancing everywhere, always and still refusing major battles with large English armies. The war lords of Charles V applied scorched earth tactics, assaulting the English garrisons and regular troops from all sides, disrupting their provisioning, and defeating smaller bands of English. Already by the end of 1369, the French had captured Abbeville and the county of Ponthieu, threatening Calais, and they were winning large territories in the Périgord, Quercy and the Agenais around and in Aquitaine. Many Gascon lords joined their men-at-arms to the troops of the French war lords.

Charles V did not forget his issues with the roaming mercenary bands of warriors. His program of exhausting the mercenaries continued with a new campaign for which the king paid, a new campaign in the Alsace region against the Hapsburg rulers. The war leader for Charles V in that expedition was Enguerrand de Coucy, but in September of 1369 already, Charles V recalled Coucy from the Alsace, where the war seemed to be going badly. The king wanted Coucy back in France to fight against the English armies. The mercenaries were left to plunder the Alsace at will. King Charles had by then several excellent war leaders for his armies, but since his troops attacked on all fronts, he needed yet more able warlords, experienced in the harassing tactics he had ordered. Among these men were once more Bertrand du Guesclin, whom the king appointed as his connétable, Coucy of Picardy, the Breton leader Olivier de Clisson who was nicknamed the Butcher, the knight Boucicault, the Admiral Jean de Vienne, and others.

The war went from bad to worse for the English in Gascony. The famous Sir John Chandos was killed there, and many castles and lands were captured by the French troops. England reacted in its now usual way by launching terrible, devastating punishment expeditions through the countryside of France. John of Gaunt led the first of such campaigns in August, in Normandy, right before the harvest. Campaigns such as this one destroyed the stocks of grain in France, leading to famine in the country and raising the price of grain in Flanders.

By April of 1370, John of Gaunt also led a small English army to Gascony, to reinforce his older brother, the prince of Wales.

A second grand *chevauchée* was launched for England by Sir Robert Knollys from out of Calais, destroying cities in and around Picardy, cities such as Arras and Noyon. Knollys devastated the lands of Picardy until near Paris, but still King Charles V refused him a major battle. Charles ordered incessant but limited raids to be launched against the English to exhaust them. These French attacks brought about many skirmishes, decimating the English troops, which were hard to replenish with men. Knollys considered his campaign a punitive expedition, so he caused as much harm as possible to the already badly suffering population of Picardy.

Prince Edward of Wales had to spend his troops and his treasury on hard sieges to win back some of the cities the French had captured during their first, quick offensives. In August and September of 1370, Limoges having been invested by a strong French garrison, the prince of Wales attacked the city, together with his brother John of Gaunt. Limoges was defended heroically by its Bishop Jehan de Cros, but the English captured it after a deadly siege, which involved mining the walls of the city. Limoges was sacked and more than three thousand inhabitants killed. The people of France were suffering to the extreme from the violence of the English after the plague.

\*\*\*\*\*

Meanwhile, in Flanders, negotiations for the marriage of Margaret of Male, daughter of the count, to Philip the Bold of Burgundy, had been on-going. For Flanders, the talks were led by Louis's mother, the princess of royal French blood and former wife of Louis de Nevers. She was an astute negotiator, and the negotiations lasted and lasted because Louis of Male and his mother wanted the most from the agreement, to the advantage of the count and of his future son-in-law. Philip the Bold was very intelligent, arrogant as all such lords, and something of an oaf, a man with heavy limbs, little elegance, a slow gait, but not unhandsome to some women. He supported Louis of Male's mother wholeheartedly.

An agreement was only reached in April of 1369, and the marriage could take place two months later, in June, at the very end of the plague in Flanders. Count Louis of Male chose Ghent, maybe his most wealthy and largest town despite the setbacks of the plague, as the place for the wedding.

On the nineteenth of June 1369, the wedding of Margaret of Male with Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy was celebrated with extraordinary pomp, feasts, banquets and celebrations. These feasts might have equally well celebrated the victory of the *Gentenaars* over the plague, the feast of the survivors. The Pharaïldis families contributed generously to the expenses of the city.

Count Louis of Male also spent fortunes on the wedding ceremony, impressing the noblemen of the court of Paris, the Flemish lords, the French sires and the nobility of Burgundy. The

aldermen of Ghent pressed out their last funds and capabilities for grandiose feasts to demonstrate their wealth.

With the agreement to the wedding, Louis of Male and the county of Flanders received the castellanies of Lille, Douai and Orchies. These were the castellanies the counts of Flanders had lost to France at the Treaty of Pontoise. If, however, the marriage could produce no male heir, the king of France could buy back the regions of Lille, Douai and Orchies he had conceded to the county of Flanders, and add them once more to the royal domains. Count Louis did not doubt one moment his daughter would produce male offspring with the younger brother of King Charles V of Valois.

Moreover, the Treaty of Iniquity, the scandalous Treaty of Athis, the greatest wrong ever done to Flanders, was definitely refuted and declared void.

With this return to Flanders of the vast and rich territories of the north, and with the stain of Athis removed, Count Louis of Male had succeeded in all the demands made by the parliament of Flanders and by James van Artevelde thirty years earlier!

Margaret of Male and Philip the Bold swore an oath never to let Flanders pass into the hands of the throne of France.

Louis of Male also obtained from the couple the promise they would use Flemish counsellors for the government of Flanders. Count Louis used more and more Flemish counsellors around him, to appease the threatening conflicts in the county.

Like James van Artevelde, Count Louis of Male kept seeking good relation with England, for a good part of the wealth of Flanders still depended from the sale of woollen cloth. The relations were of course soured by the marriage of Louis's daughter to Philip the Bold, but not interrupted.

After the wedding of his daughter, Louis of Male was left with an empty treasury. He tried to increase his income from the taxes in Flanders, and by manipulating the Flemish coinage in devaluations. In a way, these schemes also helped the weavers of Ghent in particular, for the devaluation helped the export of cloth. Nevertheless, Louis remained in conflict with the weavers, who had gained considerable power in Flanders and Ghent in the meantime, over the high taxes. The fullers of Ghent suffered most from the devaluations, for what they had to import became more expensive, such as the grain of their bread, and their fulling clay, whereas their wages remained low. The fullers considered it was once more they, the poorer classes, who bore the weight of the devaluations. The guilds of the Flemish cities grumbled, and a little grumbling in Flanders meant that revolts threatened in the cities!

Count Louis of Male had sworn to uphold the privileges and the freedoms of the towns of Flanders, as stated in the charters of the towns, preciously guarded and archived in the cities' *belforts*. The count, however, installed a tribunal with the highest jurisdiction in Flanders by a system of the Count's Audiences. A Procurator-General was appointed, and Louis reinforced the authority of his bailiffs in the county. Somewhat in a similar rule as was ordained in England, he allowed the Flemish language to be used in the acts of the clerks of justice, instead of French, the language of his court. This centralisation under his authority of fundamental liberties of the people, also made men of the guilds angry, for a cornerstone of their freedoms was the right of any *poorter* to be judged by a court of his city only, not by any other courts of justice. These measures of Louis of Male angered little by little the people against the count.



## Chapter 6. The Transition Years. Spring 1370 – Autumn 1379

### A domestic Quarrel

During the plague months, from the autumn of 1368 to the end of the summer of 1369, Heyla de Smet saw little of Count Louis of Male. Later, his time was much taken with his son-in-law, Philip of Burgundy. He had only rarely stopped at Beoostenblijje. Louis had begun explaining to Philip the Bold what Flanders was about and where and how the wealth of the county was won. The count returned to Heyla in the winter of 1369, and then, Flanders at relative peace and Burgundy exploring Flanders on his own, Louis stayed practically the entire winter in what he called his countryside love nest. Beoostenblijje was of course not more the countryside than Male, it lacked nothing of the comfort of the count's palace, but it really was situated farther from the centre of the count's power, farther away from Bruges and Ghent, and farther away from the main roads that traversed Flanders. No large roads of any importance passed by Heyla's domain, so the manor of the Four Crafts was the ideal place for the count to come to rest and to reflect. Messengers and courtiers continued riding on and off to the manor, but these remained for a short time only, a few hours at the most, to confer with Louis of Male. In the late spring of 1370, the count returned to his castle near Bruges. Heyla de Smet noticed that what should happen had indeed happened. Although she was already thirty-seven years old, she was pregnant again. Louis of Male visited Beoostenblijje several times thereafter, also realised his mistress was again with child, but he and Heyla did not particularly worry, for Heyla had brought Louis's children into this world with astonishing ease. Only a midwife of Axel had been necessary to help her with the births.

At the beginning of November of 1370, Count Louis of Male rode into the gardens of Beoostenblijje, once again with a happy smile on his face, quite satisfied to have shed off for a time the worries of Male, proud and strong in his knowledge of being the undisputed master of Flanders. The main rooms of Beoostenblijje had been built to Italian and French model ten feet above the ground. Two flights of stairs, to left and right, led from the front garden to the fine oak door, which let the visitors enter a small reception space, in which yet another flight of finely carved stone stairs led to the rooms on the first floor. Usually, Heyla de Smet ran out of that door, arms opened, to welcome her lover, who would run up the outer stairs. They would embrace then and Louis would take her by the waist and draw her inside. This time, another woman waited at the top of the stairs, a woman Louis also knew but was a little surprise to find at Beoostenblijje. She was Marie Vresele, Heyla's mother. Marie was almost sixty years old. She had become a fine, dignified matron with a pretty, round face, dressed humbly in a brown woollen dress kept together at the waist by a leather belt. Marie was a lively, good-natured, kind, good-tempered woman of Ghent, who had always showed a warm heart to Louis of Male as soon as she had accepted her daughter could not marry her lover, but was loved indeed. Now, Marie stood on the dais in front of the door with a stern face, even though she gave Louis a smile. Louis jumped two stairs at a time to Marie. 'Lady Marie! A good day to you! I am glad to be at Beoostenblijje! Is Heyla in?'

Marie smiled, for the count's first words had been for her daughter. The count of Flanders, she felt, still appreciated her daughter, and he still came back to Heyla, despite rumours of other mistresses and other bastard children but Heyla's, rumours which circulated freely as gossip in Ghent, and which were no doubt truthful. Marie curtsied, at which Louis took her arm and refused the honour.

‘Count Louis, lord,’ Marie began, ‘I hope you had a good journey. Yes, Heyla is in, but she has been a little sick, lately. The child in her womb has been given her hard work. Heyla is weak, but well. She has been forced to keep her bed on orders of the doctor we called. Heyla asked me to receive you. I am your servant.’

‘No such courtly language between us, mother Marie. Heyla is ill? Heyla has never, never been ill! She doesn’t know what being ill means, my Heyla! I must see her immediately. Where is she?’

‘She is in her bedroom, lord, but awake. You can go upstairs to her, she is waiting for you. She wanted to come down, but I refused. I will be in the great hall if you would like to talk to me.’

Louis of Male ran on, still jumping two stairs at the time. He ran through the corridor of the first floor, found the door to Heyla’s room closed, knocked, but did not wait for an answer and pushed open the panels, rushing to the bed.

Heyla de Smet sat in the bed, on the clean white covers, like a rose in a silvery meadow.

Large, white cushions were propped against her back in the bed. She held her arms open, and Louis of Male was in two steps near her, embraced her passionately, though a little less impetuously than at other moments, looking appalled at Heyla’s whitened face.

‘Heyla, darling, what happened? You look pale! I’m so glad to be with you. You’ll get better, now, I’m sure! Why haven’t you sent me a messenger? I would have come earlier!’

‘I’m just a little sick, Louis dear, women’s illnesses, nothing to worry about. I feel a bit frail, the world turns around me when I’m on my feet, so I feel unsure while walking. The doctor and the midwife told me to lie down for a few days, that is all! It seems this is quite typical for pregnant women! I must eat more, they tell me, but I’ll grow very fat and ugly if I eat more. I never changed my habits during my other pregnancies, you know, so I’m not getting fat this time either! I’m afraid you will be disappointed with me. I cannot be your lover for a few days!’

‘You are always my love, Heyla, also when we only sit by each other, holding hands. Your hands have a bewitching effect on me. When we hold hands, peacefulness glides over me, envelops me, and that blows away all my worries. You are pale, and skinny, but you are as beautiful as ever. I brought you a present!’

Heyla wondered how Louis could find her skinny with a belly blown up like a cow’s bladder, but she had not time to answer, for Louis was unpacking his gift, and Heyla was all expectation. Louis of Male took a package of red velvet cloth from his belt and presented it to Heyla. He did that with his usual shyness and clumsiness, so that Heyla smiled at recognising the fumbling of her young lover of so many years ago. Heyla took the package from his hands, unrolled it, undoing the knot of the broad string. The package was quite heavy, and revealed at long last a long, magnificent golden necklace of elaborately decorated plaques, a thumb wide, of engraved and enamelled gold forming the chain. At the end hung a pendant with a large green stone set in the middle, surrounded by smaller, white stones and pearls.

‘Your father made this,’ Louis explained. ‘I asked him to come to Male with some of his best jewels with green stones, and he guessed the pieces were for you. The chain is a double love-chain, made with love by your father and offered with love by me! I wish you a fine pregnancy. In a way, I’m a brute, and I apologise.’

‘Thank you so much, Louis. Why apologise for giving me a life? You shouldn’t have bought this jewel. You spend fortunes for me, I do not really deserve so many attentions, so much honour!’

‘No honour, darling, love! Don’t doubt that! Love!’

Somebody knocked at the door, so Louis called, ‘come in!’

Marie Vresele entered the bedroom.

Marie saw her daughter in Louis's arms, Louis also sitting on the bed, but Louis not in the least embarrassed, caressing Heyla's shoulder. Heyla had effectively gained redder colours in her cheeks, her eyes gleaming. Marie also noticed the sparkling jewel on Heyla's breast. She smiled, for she recognised the jewel, knew where it had come from. The scene showed only happiness.

'Lord,' she said, 'I'm sorry to disturb. The doctor and the midwife wait downstairs. If you would like to talk to them ...'

'Yes, of course, I want to talk to them. I want to know what is amiss with my dear Heyla, and when she will get better. Tell them I'm coming!'

Louis turned back to Heyla.

'Heyla, dear, I'll have to go downstairs to the hall. I must know what the doctor tells about you!'

'Oh, don't listen to that old quack,' Heyla exclaimed. 'I'm fine enough! Most women get a little sick when they're with child. A midwife will suffice for me at the time of birth!'

She sighed, 'well, run off, then, but come back and have supper with me in my room, and tell me what you've been doing at Male. That will cheer us up, both. I'm dying to know how your new son-in-law, that duke of Burgundy thinks!'

Count Louis of Male smiled. In the past, much of how he had decided on intricate issues had been influenced by the talks he had with Heyla de Smet on the subjects. If his courtiers knew that when he had a really difficult issue he would ride to Beoostenblijje to think, and how Heyla forced him to think in the right direction, his lords would be more than envious of her! Louis stood from the bed, reluctant to leave his love, but he followed Marie Vresele.

While they descended the stairs, Marie explained, 'I am sorry, lord. You have many worries at your head with the county. I would have liked Heyla to be better. A messenger came to warn me in Ghent. Heyla had been asking for my presence. She is more ill than she seems, more than she wants us to believe. She has not smiled much these last days, and I know she is in pain though she says nothing about it. I must give you a warning, if you allow me. I have also very little confidence in the doctor Heyla made come to here. He may be the best doctor of Axel, as I heard, but even the midwife seems not to be sure about him. The midwife knows her matter, though. She is very competent.'

'We'll see,' Louis grumbled, indeed annoyed having come to worries instead of fleeing from them. He was happy, however, he could for once be of some use to his beloved Heyla. Usually, it was more Heyla who helped him out than he her.

A little later, Marie and Count Louis entered the hall of Beoostenblijje. The doctor and the midwife stood in a corner near the large windows. The doctor and the woman curtsied. Louis of Male waved the formalities aside.

He said, 'doctor and nurse, a good day to you too. Let us not waste words! You were called to the bed of my dear Heyla. What is the matter with her? Do not wind white cloths around your words.'

The doctor, a thin man with spidery legs had a wrinkled, ferret-like face Louis of Male disliked instantly, but the count decided to hear the man out and to remain polite.

The doctor looked at the midwife, who was a heavy, stout woman with a rosy face of about fifty years old.

He said in a low, sharp voice, 'we are very sorry about what happens to the Lady Heyla. She is very weak. I have bled her several times, hoping to restore the balance of her humours, hoping also to draw black bile with the blood, and I have also proposed her to eat differently. She has to take in more meat, though fowl meat instead of pork and beef. We try to make her

stronger. To ease the pain, I have given her some medicines, in small quantities so as not to disturb the child.'

'Good God, man,' Louis of Male interrupted, 'tell me what is wrong with her, what is the matter with my Heyla?'

'The child is a big one, lord,' the midwife took over. 'I think it must be a boy, a big boy! The issue is, the child is not in the right position. I have handled cases like this. The child may not turn well and it presses inside the Lady Heyla as it should not, so she is disturbed, and hence the sickness. I think I can save the child when it is ready to come, but Lady Heyla may have to be cut, and I'm not sure the child will turn well, so I'm not sure she can be saved. The birth will be difficult this time, extremely difficult! I must warn you, lord, and I'm very sorry, but I may not be able to save her. She may get more sick, and stay sick until the day of birth. The actual birth may be difficult!'

Count Louis saw the midwife was honest, a woman who cared for Heyla, and who wanted to tell him the truth, however hard. The midwife was almost crying, tears appeared in her eyes. The doctor intervened with an angry face, reproaching the midwife for having interrupted him, 'we will do everything needed to save her, of course, lord, but in cases like this a priest would be welcome too.'

Count Louis paled, did not grant the doctor one look.

He stepped forward to the midwife, asking, 'have you delivered the other children of Heyla?'

'I did, lord. The other births were easy! The children just popped out of her, rapidly, almost no pain! I did not need to help her much. I did what was necessary, though. I'll spare you the details. This is not a pregnancy as her previous ones.'

'So you know Heyla. You know how she is constituted, how she feels, when she is in pain?'

'I do, lord, I know the Lady Heyla intimately, of course, but this time, I feel she is not right. The child is not right. She may stay in pain for a long time. I know of no cure for this situation. I'll do what I can, but I fear this birth.'

'How many births have you feared, midwife, what is your name?'

'My name is Lisbeth, lord, and no, I have feared very few births in my life, very few indeed. I have brought tens of children to his world. This birth, I really fear!'

'All right! Thank you for an honest answer.'

Count Louis of Male kept a silence. He was thinking, considering. He didn't show his sudden panic. The blood had also left his face, for this was bad news indeed! He gripped the corner of the table, but held firmly. Some kind of a decision was asked of him, here. He remained standing for long moments in the hall without speaking, thinking.

Then he said, 'tell me, Lisbeth, can Heyla travel in a carriage drawn by horses?'

The doctor remained silent for he had not been addressed. He also preferred not to have to answer this question, for he had no idea what he might say.

The midwife replied, 'I think so, lord, yes! We would place many cushions under her to damp the shocks of the road. She is not really in high pains for now. Pains come, but that is more because of the child itself, when it turns. The wagon should move very slowly, and much cushions would have to be placed under her, but yes, she could be moved, gently.'

'Good, good,' Male decided.

He suddenly knew what should be done.

'Midwife Lisbeth, I shall have need of you. Can you leave your home for a couple of months? I know I'm asking much of you. I want to take Heyla and you to Male. You may be needed on the travel. I want you at the side of Heyla during the voyage. I'd also like you, Mother Marie, to come with us to Male. So, Lisbeth, can you come with us and stay until Heyla gives birth? I want you to deliver the child, too, at Male. You will be generously paid, of course.'

‘Yes, lord. You do me honour. I’ll have to pack my things and warn my husband, say goodbye to my children, but yes, I can come with the Lady Heyla and the Lady Marie.’

‘Thus we decide, then,’ Louis straightened. ‘We travel as soon as you are ready. The sooner the better, today if possible, even if it’s late. Mother, can you prepare everything? There must be a fine wagon or a carriage at Beostenblijje, a good driver willing to take the wagon to Male. I’ll escort the wagon. I’ll give you a guard, Lisbeth, take a horse if you need one, go as quick as you can and return to here. If possible, we’ll travel this very day!’

‘I can go with you, lord, if you would like that,’ the doctor proposed.

‘That won’t be necessary,’ Louis of Male cut the doctor off. ‘I have the best doctors of Flanders at Male and Bruges. I’m taking her to my castle. She’ll get the best treatment there.’ The doctor bowed, glad not to have to assist at the birth. Only God knew how the mighty of the earth might react when something went wrong with this birth, and he thought the midwife was right in stating the mother might not be saved. He didn’t want to be blamed for the death of the mistress of a count, a mistress the count obviously appreciated much.

The same day in the afternoon, a wagon with Heyla de Smet, shouting she did not want to travel, but placed nevertheless on a bed of cushions, and another wagon for Marie Vresele and Lisbeth the midwife, departed from Beostenblijje, escorted by Count Louis of Male and five of his guards. They rode slowly to the castle of Male. With stops, everybody extremely tired, they arrived the next day by noon at Male, having halted when it was so dark the wagon drivers could not anymore distinguish the potholes in the road in front of them. Count Louis of Male installed Heyla de Smet in a wing of the castle, quenching her protests. Male was not a very large castle, rather more a pleasure manor than a fortress. When Heyla was in pain, her cries could be heard in the great hall, where once James van Artevelde had been invited. The courtiers of Male, who were housed elsewhere, were scandalised. It was not unheard of that a count, a prince or a lord brought his mistress to court, to a gallant dance party or to a banquet, but a count having invited his mistress to stay and live in his castle, to the place where the countess lived and also held her court, was a scandal! And the mistress was pregnant, the prove of adultery brought to the count’s castle! It was an insult delivered to the count’s wife, to Margaret of Brabant, even though she was absent of Male at the moment. Margaret was in her castle of Rethel, a region she found more appropriate to pass the winter in than in Flanders, but she could return any moment, to rule with her husband over Flanders, and especially over Mechelen and Antwerp!

When Countess Margaret was absent from court, she always left near Count Louis a few noblemen who were pleased to demonstrate her their loyalty. Margaret liked hearing what was happening at each instant at Male. She knew Louis enjoyed mistresses, and she was jealous, even though she had not shared the count’s bed for several years.

After a few days, one of the men left behind to serve Margaret in the manor of Male, jumped on his horse and rode off. Nobody asked him where he rode to, but Louis of Male had no illusions about somebody sooner or later bringing the news of Heyla’s presence at Male to his wife. In the meantime, the best doctors from Bruges, Flemish doctors and Italian masters of medicine who had accompanied the Florentine bankers and merchants to Bruges, came and went. Louis let Marie Vresele chose the doctors that could return to examine Heyla. The doctors confirmed what the doctor of Axel and the midwife had told.

Count Louis of Male could be seen pacing up and down in his great hall, extremely nervous about what might happen to Heyla de Smet. He had suddenly realised how much Heyla meant to him. His liking of her was deep and strong. He needed Heyla with him, for she was part of

him, the only woman to whom he could speak about his joys and pains in a very informal, warm and honest way.

‘Heyla is my resting corner,’ he explained to Marie Vresele, ‘my other me, my mirror, to whom I can talk and be totally sure my confession and doubts will remain between the two of us. I love her instinctively. It has always been like that, ever since I laid eyes upon her for the first time. God has destined us to be together. What should I become without my Heyla? I love her child already, but if I would have to choose between the mother or the child, I would choose the mother! Heyla would curse me all her life, but I would choose her! I should have known she was old to be a mother yet, I should have protected her better. This all my fault. I couldn’t bear losing my Heyla!’

Far into December, when the child was due, Heyla’s state worsened. Her pains came more regularly, exhausted her, and while in pain she could not but shout in agony. The doctors calmed her with medicines, but they told Count Louis also they did not want to administer strong drugs on pregnant women, lest the child was put in danger too early.

By the end of that month, more knights and lords showed up at the court to feast Christmas with Louis of Male. These lords, Louis’s best friends, would not have raised an eyebrow to a woman, especially not a mistress, calling out in the pains of pregnancy while giving birth, for that was the natural way of things women-like, and they were all very loyal to Count Louis, but the situation was a bit awkward. The ones who liked the count only wore a knowing smile. Among the greatest lords to arrive was also Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy. Burgundy would later visit his wife, who had remained in another of the count’s castles in Ghent. Philip made no comment, but he had heard of the wailing mistress at Male, and he found the morals and the habits of the Flemish court strange indeed, so different from the more formal French court of his brother. He had known of similar situations, though, of the lesser French nobles. Still, he, and probably also his brother, King Charles, would have wished for more discretion. They would have hidden their mistresses in the pains of giving birth in smaller castles, not in their own palace. Keeping one’s wailing mistress in one’s own crowded palace was not a very discrete matter! And what did the church say?

On an afternoon of the end of December 1370, several carriages, among which one very nicely decorated, rode into the courtyard of the castle of Male. Out stepped stately Margaret of Brabant, countess of Flanders, Louis’s wife, in full glory. She was accompanied by an escort of twenty heavily armed and armoured men. Quite a few lords of her husband’s court, and her son-in-law, Duke Philip of Burgundy, welcomed her, not Louis of Male. Burgundy thought, ‘all the puppets of the theatre will be set dancing, now. I’m going to learn who is with Louis, and who with Margaret.’

When Margaret ran into the castle, she had a very angry, tense face to show to the bewildered men and women who bowed for her.

Once inside, she threw off her cloak to a squire and shrieked in her usual, very high-pitched voice, ‘where is the count? Somebody fetch me the count! Louis, where are you hiding?’

Count Louis of Male had heard the carriage riding into the yard. He had also expected Margaret to come to Male and make quite a scene. Had Margaret appreciated and honoured discretion, she would not have come in the middle of the winter to Male! Surely, she knew Heyla de Smet was lying in one of the many rooms upstairs, the room next to Heyla occupied by Marie Vresele and then two other rooms by Heyla’s midwife and by one of the best doctors of Bruges. No, Louis feared, Margaret had come to shove the scandal down his throat. He had lent sufficient patience to Margaret, Louis cursed. When Margaret would start shouting, this time he would shout back and tell her a truth or two.

When Louis therefore heard the angry noise in his entrance hall, he had the doors of his great hall opened. He stopped at the wooden panels, saying, quite loudly too, in a honeyed voice, ‘Margaret, dear! What a surprise to see you at Male, and what a good day to have you here! Was it too cold in Rethel? How are you?’

Margaret was still drawing off her gloves when she passed Louis, striding like a queen into the hall, shouting to the servants and to the lords who had been sitting with the count, ‘out with you all! I must talk to the count alone! Out, I tell you, out!’

The lords and the servants hurried from the hall, not daring one word, and also having no words to say at that dreadful moment. While they ran, they bowed to Margaret, who ignored them as if they were cockroaches passing by, and the door panels closed behind them.

Margaret of Brabant closed the panels tight herself, leaned with her hands against the wood, then sighed, turned, and faced her husband.

She shouted, ‘Louis, is it true you have brought your mistress to Male to give birth, a difficult birth it seems, to a bastard child of yours?’

Louis of Male paled only a little. He had expected being scorned at for Heyla’s presence, but he had hoped a talk in subdued, polite words. Margaret spoke very direct and spat the words out with venom in her voice.

‘I did,’ he replied, as calmly as he could, mustering his courage. ‘It should come as no surprise to you, my dear I have mistresses.’

‘And you dare bringing your mistress to your castle, your residence, to flaunt the presence of that woman in my face during the feasts of Christmas, soiling the rooms with her blood? You publicly humiliated and insulted the countess of Flanders by such an act! Shame be on Flanders!’

‘No insult was meant. My mistress is giving birth, but she needs the care of the best doctors of Bruges. So I brought her here, where she can get the best care.’

‘Louis, I want that woman immediately out of Male! The scandal has lasted long enough! Before nightfall, I want your whore out of here, so that the castle remains unstained. I want her back on her way to whatever rat-hole she came from, do you hear? Never has a noble woman of the highest birth as I, been so lowly insulted. You trampled with your feet on every rule of keeping up decent appearances, every courtly rule of discretion! Get that woman out of here!’

‘No,’ Male cried.

Margaret was astonished. She had thought her arrival would have sufficed for Louis to see his wrongs and for shipping off the whore instantly.

‘What no? You dare to say no to me? If you don’t throw that whore out of here, I shall complain to all the kings and to the emperor, Louis, for your indecent behaviour in Flanders. I am the countess of Flanders, Louis, the daughter of the duke of Brabant! You owe me respect. Out with that woman!’

‘No, no, no,’ Louis of Male repeated. ‘No! I won’t let Heyla be moved out of the castle. She cannot travel in her present state. Her child may be hurt. She stays here. You either put up with this, or you go!’

Margaret’s face flushed red with anger. She stamped with her left foot, and then swung out her hand to strike at Louis, but he had noticed the aggression coming, rapidly brought his head to the side, so that Margaret slammed her hand not to his face but into thin air.

‘You son of a whoremonger,’ Margaret shouted, ‘we took you in, my father and I, when you were fatherless, penniless, wounded and humiliated after Crécy, pursued by the men of the cities and Flanders, and we took care of you. You were a coward then, a shy little boy. I am your lawfully wedded wife. I had children by you. Your other children, quite some, I heard,

are bastards. How do you think your son-in-law, Burgundy, and his brother, the king of France, as well as your own mother, a princess of royal blood, will judge you for such an insult? You will be condemned by every crowned head, and the pope will excommunicate you for being a fornicator, an adulterer, a whoremonger and a man who repudiates his wife in his own castle!

‘They may all do as they like,’ Louis replied. ‘Who would dare to touch, or even to say the very least word of disapproval of the count of Flanders, the richest county of France? I will provide an answer too! Why, as to the king of France, I might stop offering him money to pay his campaigns by!’

Louis of Male roared at his own joke, laughing hard and loud in the hall.

‘You cannot insult me this way! You simply cannot! You are going to be very sorry for this insult! You sin with adultery, you fornicate with the lower classes!’

‘Maybe I will, Margaret, but then, what have you given me? No male heir, only a daughter. You refused me your bed after the first years of marriage. Any normal-blooded man has natural lusts that have to be satisfied. God has created nature and men thus. Who is the sinner here? I, or the woman who pushed me into sin by her unnatural refusal to share a bed with me? Are you really a woman? Are you a woman to me? What use do I have of you? I may have ever nurtured sweet feelings for you, feelings of strong affection. Those feelings didn’t last long, for you smothered them very rapidly and very efficiently, pushing me away by vile words and by making me feel to be a beggar for your services. We have been a couple only for a very short time, Margaret! I didn’t long for your presence at my court! Whether you are at court or not, I am totally indifferent to. You have produced no male heir, and you never will. We share no feelings of any kind.’

Margaret of Brabant shrank to an old, bent woman, then. She had to lean on a chair.

‘What God has united, no man can tear apart, not even you,’ she whispered.

‘True,’ Louis of Male threw back at her, ‘but that doesn’t mean I should still experience the slightest feeling of joy at seeing you again. Heyla stays at Male until she has given birth.’

‘One of us then is too much at Male,’ Margaret then shouted again. ‘I shall not stay one moment longer in this castle, but I shall complain to the kings and to the pope. I shall not share this castle with a whore of low birth, do you hear? The world and the heavens will judge you!’

‘So be it,’ Louis of Male defied.

He thought Margaret might burst of anger.

He feared she would slash out with her claw again, overthrow chandeliers, but Margaret turned, went to the door, drew the panels open and shouted into the entrance hall, ‘guards, guards! My servants, to me! We leave! The residence of the count of Flanders stinks and is befouled by impure blood! Stop unpacking! Bring everything back to the carriages! We leave! We are riding to Brussels!’

Several lords, along whom Philip the Bold, stood in the hall. They had been listening to the shouts in the great hall, and they heard a scene was being fought, but they had not understood everything that had been shouted to and from.

Burgundy was rather scandalised with the behaviour of Count Louis.

Louis of Male heard his son-in-law plead, ‘Madame, you cannot ride alone. Let me escort you. I and my men will join you and leave the castle. I surmise you will want to return to your beautiful castle of Rethel?’

Margaret looked a little appeased at her son-in-law. She thought Philip was right. He was offering her much face, much honour by riding out with her. He was condemning the behaviour of Louis this way, and that suited her. Everybody at the court would see she,

Margaret, was the one done wrong to, and the brother of King Charles emphasised that fact. Margaret was also not sure her sister Joanna of Brabant and her brother-in-law Wenceslas, would welcome her wholeheartedly after the war of succession. Yes, it was better to show she was the insulted, neglected wife. She could ride to Tournay, to the king's city.

'Yes, yes,' she replied to Burgundy. 'Yes, please take me to Rethel. Rethel can be on your way to Burgundy!'

It was, and Philip the Bold had wanted to return to Burgundy anyway, back to his duchy. He had spent too much time in a Flanders that was so authoritatively dominated by his father-in-law anyway, and only God knew when Flanders would come into his possession. That might be twenty years hence! Here was an occasion and a gracious excuse to leave abruptly. He could have his wife fetched by another escort soon.

'I must alarm my men,' Burgundy said, 'we can ride as soon as you're ready, Madame.'

Under the bewildered eyes of the lords of Louis of Male's court, Philip of Burgundy began to shout orders to his knights and guards and servants. He ran to his room.

Merely an hour later, the carriages of Margaret of Brabant rode out of the courtyard of Male. With her rode the lords of her small court, the lords who had remained loyal to her, Brabant and French lords, and the duke of Burgundy with his guards and his proud banner. They formed a group of about fifty men on horseback, quite sufficient to ward off large bands of highway men.

Count Louis of Male stood by a window of Heyla's room, saw how they rode, slowly at first, past the field of entangled periwinkles at the end of his yard, and then they disappeared to the right at the bend in the road. He had asked two of the lords who had remained very loyal to him, discreet men, to ride with Margaret's escort and to report to him on where the countess had really gone to, and what her behaviour was when she arrived in the residence of her choice.

Margaret of Brabant, countess of Flanders, rode to Rethel, to the castle of Château-Regnault. The duke of Burgundy said goodbye to her there, and rode on to his capital of Dijon. He remained on the best of terms with his mother-in-law. Margaret's sister, Joanna of Brabant, visited her, and later, Margaret stayed for a while in Brussels also. Margaret did not ever travel back to Flanders, and did not meet again with Count Louis of Male for as long as she lived. Count Louis of Male did not formally repudiate his wife, but they did not live anymore as wife and husband. Margaret of Brabant led a pleasant, worry-less life, quietly but in splendour at Château-Regnault. Still, her castle and Rethel remained her exile. She died there in April of 1380.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heyla de Smet, unaware of what had happened between the count and the countess, stayed at Male. When Margaret was gone, Count Louis did not force his lords and knights, his court, to do homage to Heyla de Smet. Count Louis realised very well there were rules of decency he should not transgress. His ambassadors would explain what had happened to the kings of the lands.

Heyla de Smet gave birth to a healthy son, who was called Baldwin. The midwife and two doctors of Bruges worked with her an entire afternoon and evening. The child, a big, male bastard son of Louis, was born and out of danger in the middle of the night, and he lived. Midwife Lisbeth could show him proudly to the count, and Louis thanked her with tears in his eyes.

Heyla too lived, though until dawn the doctors feared for her life, for they had to cut her, and was much weakened from the efforts. In the course of the next day, she recovered. After two pleasant weeks at Male, which she spent mostly in bed, she could go to a carriage Louis of Male had prepared for her. Count Louis supported her, in view of his entire court, who thereby discovered for the first time the mysterious mistress. They were all astonished to see the shining beauty and dignity of Heyla de Smet.

The carriage and an escort of ten guards of Flanders brought Heyla, Marie and the midwife back to Beostenblijje. Lisbeth received a bag of so many golden coins, she was henceforth considered a rich woman in Axel. She knew, however, and told Heyla a little later Heyla's tissue was torn inside her. Heyla would never have more children. Heyla cried a little at that news, but she and later also Louis were glad, for Heyla did not really want anymore to go through such an ordeal as she had suffered for Baldwin at Male, and Count Louis did not want Heyla to be at risk a second time.

Count Louis of Male had younger mistresses still, of course, but he kept on returning to Beostenblijje, to where he told was his real and only wife.

Heyla would outlive Count Louis of Male, but only by a few months.

## The Strike and the Fourth Wave

The devaluations of the coinage ordered by Count Louis of Male continued to lower the value of the Flemish coins. The content of gold and silver in the coins was lowered, though in a carefully controlled way so as to ensure no sudden and catastrophic refusal of the coins in the lands around Flanders. Devaluations are always better for export than for the import of goods. Exported goods became cheaper, imported goods more expensive. Flemish cloth became cheaper for *Brabanders*, for families of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, for Frenchman, Italians, Germans and Englishman to buy, as their own coinage offered more cloth and more Flemish coins. The weavers profited from selling more cloth, for their products were cheaper. Grain, however, already in short supply because of the war in France, and because the fields of Picardy lay devastated from the endless pillaging of the mercenary bands, became rare and more expensive. Every item imported cost more Flemish coins, and that included many goods of first necessity such as grain and flour for bread and pancakes, hops for beer, fruit, hides, wood, fuller's clay and dyes, wine, and so on, whereas also indigenous goods that were in good supply soon cost more because the men who produced them saw their cost of living rise and therefore asked more money for them. This was the case for fish, meat and peat, for instance.

The weavers, the cloth merchants and the men from the small guilds could ask higher prices for their woollen cloth in Flanders, for utensils, shoes, tunics, stockings and the like. Of course, they had to take some care, for too high prices would have refrained buyers from acquiring them.

The fullers, however, saw their cost of living go up sharply, but not their salaries. This was a well-known issue in Ghent, which had led to previous revolts. Like in 1345, the fullers were slowly starving, and unable to build up reserves for worse times. We, the Pharaïldis men realised a potentially revolutionary situation had once more been created, but the aldermen of Ghent seemed to ignore the issue.

With the price of their work fixed by the aldermen of Ghent, the fullers could not ask the weavers a raise for their work of fulling. Like in 1345, the fullers asked for a raise per length

of cloth, but the weavers, as expected, and now formally back in power in the town government, refused categorically to grant them such a raise. Most of the aldermen and all of the weavers had forgotten what had happened at Bad Tuesday! Higher prices of fulling meant higher prices of cloth, the weavers argued quite understandably, and higher prices of cloth would annihilate the efforts of the devaluation of coinage, the annihilation of their competitive advantage over foreign cloth, and hence diminishing revenues for the weavers per length of cloth, and less cloth sold.

At that time, Count Louis of Male was more looking to the developments in the counties, duchies and kingdoms around him than to the evolution of the issues deep within his own county. He was most interested in his authority over Flanders, and nobody disputed him his dominance in all matters.

The count held, for instance, quite some lands and villages in dispute with the counts of Hainault, as borders had not been very well defined. He was also still seeking support from his neighbouring countries for his claims on Brabant. After negotiations, Louis of Male therefore offered these lands and properties in loan to Albert of Bavaria, the regent for Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, and these negotiations took much of his attention. Albert of Bavaria was the son of Empress Margaret of Hainault, wife of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of Germany Lewis IV, and the younger brother of Count William V of Holland. This William had fought in the wars of the Hooks and the Cods in Holland over the succession of the county of Hainault. When his mother died in 1356, the mother against whom he had fought for preponderance over the county, he inherited Hainault, so that, like his forefathers, he was again the one and only count of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland. From 1358 on, however, William's blatant insanity had resulted in the Hainault peers choosing Albert as regent. Albert had not yet become the count of Hainault in 1372, but he would receive the title and the lands later on.

Count Louis of Male wanted no conflict with Albert, and even less with the Holy Roman Empire. Albert had also helped Louis as arbiter in the War of Succession in Brabant by granting Antwerp and Mechelen to Flanders as part of the Treaty of Ath, so Louis wanted to show his generosity and amity to Albert.

The fullers of Ghent realised they would never obtain from the aldermen plus the deans of the weavers and of the small guilds any raise in salary. They themselves were badly organised. They had no dean anymore, merely a director appointed by the aldermen, a man who generally was a weaver, and hence did not really well serve their cause. What could the fullers expect from knights of the old lineages, from landowner-poorters and cloth merchants, from rich men such as William Bette, John Mayhuus, James Soyssone, Geerem Borluut or Simon de Grutere? These men dominated the Council of the aldermen of the *Keure*, of the Law, and of the *Gedeele*, of the Government of the city, and even the *Collatie*, the larger council of the aldermen with the deans and other magistrates. The deans of the weavers and of the smaller guilds exerted further power over the aldermen.

In the early spring of 1373, the fullers assembled in their guild hall, unknown to their leader of the guild, their director. This man had been appointed to lead them by the aldermen, so he was not a man of their own choice, and he was a weaver, not a fuller. Martin Denout was far more a landowner-poorter now than a fuller, though his family owned several fulling mills and even though a few fullers still worked for him. He barely kept contact with the guild of the fullers. His son, John Denout, now almost twenty, liked the company of fullers, so he assisted at the secret meeting instead of his father. Martin worked

with me, Jehan Terhagen, and he lived in the countryside like a landed gentleman at Westdorp Manor, where he could call himself Sir Martin Denout of Westdorp, but John preferred living in Ghent. He had shown interest in the mills, he had tried fulling, had been a fuller's apprentice and had been accepted in the guild as a master-fuller, despite his young age.

The meeting of the fullers of Ghent was a rather chaotic affair, thought John, for without real leaders, many men shouted among and through each other, refusing often to let the other speak their argument to the end. John thought he was too young to impose his views, and too little of a fuller. He had wanted to run to the dais in the hall and call for order, but he was not sure someone so young would have the authority to be listened to. He heard the arguments being shouted, with incredulity and patience. There was talk of revolt in the hall, of an armed uprising against the weavers, but more voices shouted the weavers and the smaller guilds would conspire to quench any armed revolt of the fullers inside the town. The arguments then came to a standstill, for against the combined militia of the two most important guilds, the unorganised and leaderless fullers would have no chance of prevailing.

‘What should we do then?’ a big, desperate fuller cried. ‘With the money we receive nowadays for fulling cloth, we can only starve! I work from morning till evening, and I cannot feed my children anymore. I’d rather die by the sword than see my wife and children die from starvation. The only alternative left for me is to go to the countryside and sell myself and my family as journeymen to reap in harvests and help on farms. In the winter, I’ll have to beg in the streets of some town other than Ghent, for I will be too ashamed to beg in this city! How I am to survive the winter, I have no idea!’

The other men agreed. No fuller could save one coin this year. They all had too few coins left for living decently. They would have to send their children and women to beg.

‘If we cannot live from our fulling craft anymore, we might as well stop working,’ another told, head bowed.

‘There is the solution! That’s right, we must stop working,’ a youth shouted. ‘If we stop fulling for a while, where then will the weavers go to have their cloth fulled? They would have to send their cloth to other cities to be fulled and have it to be transported back to Ghent. Would they find enough fullers in other towns? I don’t think so. And the transport would cost them a fortune! Besides, nobody in Ghent but us know how to full quality cloth. The weavers will ask us on their knees to return to Ghent!’

‘No, they won’t,’ another man cried. ‘Do you think the aldermen have waited for you to think of this refusal to work? The aldermen know our situation all too well! They have been expecting a revolt of some kind. They have been preparing for such an eventuality, and I have this from an excellent source, a statute is on the vote by which any fuller who refuses to work will be exiled out of the city. The same statute will forbid us to leave the city, for there are already not enough fullers in Ghent to full all the cloth the weavers produce. We will also be forbidden to carry weapons! They expect a revolt and a refusal to work, of course they do! What do you think the aldermen will do with the first fuller who refuses to work? The man will be imprisoned, tortured, judged and condemned to ten years of exile, and then his family will starve in the most horrible way, unaided by the guild!’

‘That is true for one fuller who refuses to work or who leaves town,’ John Denout intervened, ‘but what can the aldermen do if you all, all the fullers at once, leave the city and don’t come back for a while? Not only would the aldermen not be able to stop you, for you are all entitled to visit your families in other towns for instance. They wouldn’t know what was happening to them until it would be too late. They would not be able putting their hands on you, for you

would be far from Ghent by the time they would realise what is happening. Catching one or two of you would change nothing to the situation!’

‘True, true! That is what we have to do, fellows,’ yet another fuller cried then. ‘We walk out of the city tomorrow, all of us, with our families. We all go out and leave, so that not one fuller remains in Ghent. We walk through all the gates, at ease, so as not to draw too much attention, and when asked by the guards to where we go, we tell them we go to Bruges to see a sick relative, or whatever story. Only, we don’t go to Bruges. Take your tents! We can go south, to near Deinze, five miles from Ghent. Let’s all take tents and provisions. We can live in the countryside for a few months, if need be. We put our provisions together and choose a committee to lead us. We buy what we can with our last coins, and we leave!’

The fullers cried all then, as if from one sole coarse throat, ‘we leave! We leave! We must teach the weavers a lesson! Tomorrow, we leave Ghent!’

John Denout was flabbergasted. He had shouted his sudden idea without really thinking much about the matter, and now the fullers enthusiastically endorsed it! Did the fullers actually and indeed plan to leave Ghent? It was a totally desperate move! How would they all live in a camp? They would be about four thousand men plus their families, at least eight or nine thousand people in all, living in the open. They could bring small tents, but from what would they live, so many together in the countryside? No town, certainly no town of the quarter of Ghent, would allow the fullers in, for all the aldermen would fear the wrath of Ghent and the risk of revolts in their own town from having ten thousand angry, very poor people inside their walls. The fate of the fullers of those towns would not be much better than the fate of the fullers of Ghent. Revolt would grumble in those towns too. So, where would the fullers of Ghent find a place to sleep, to set up campfires? They would have to occupy the woods, for very little open terrain remained free between Ghent and the borders of the county. All the land was used for fields or pastures. No man could survive in a swamp! Settling thus in woods or on fallow land would make the lords of the castellanies very angry. A general strike of so many was unheard of! Yet, thought John Denout then, was it not the only non-violent, honourable solution to the issue of the fullers, and one that would leave the weavers and the aldermen powerless? Without a substantial salary increase, the fullers might as well perish in Flanders’ countryside as die of shame in Ghent. John Denout admired his townsmen then for being able to draw such a logical conclusion, and for having decided together to the only possible, feasible solution to thwart the repression of the aldermen and of the weavers. How many fullers would really leave Ghent tomorrow? If only a few indeed walked out, the movement would be the laughing stock of the weavers! How successful would the appeal of the fullers present in their guild hall be on the rest of the fullers of the city?

The fullers remained a short while still discussing heatedly in the hall, until their director came running into the hall, panting and exhausted.

The man shrieked, ‘you cannot hold a meeting here! I have not given my permission and neither have the inspectors of the hall! The man who gave you the keys to the hall will be severely punished! If you think you can revolt, forget it! The militia of the guilds and the men-at-arms of the aldermen and of the count will cut you down! What have you been concocting?’

John Denout saw how by common consent, the fullers only showed their disdain for the man. They suddenly all stopped talking. They didn’t answer the director, and left the hall in silence. In doing so, they passed by the director, and the most daring young fullers slammed their shoulders into the man. The director protested each time, shrieking on, but he was too afraid of doing anything among so many excited and hostile men. John Denout also left.

From early morning till late in the afternoon of the next day, a fine sunny day of April of 1373, many families could be seen walking through all the gates and open streets of the city. The guards, the White Hoods of Ghent, opened the gates early, but then a guard only here and there remained at the gates. In the first hours, nobody asked anything of the families that walked out. Some men pushed a cart with a few belongings and with food for the road, women and children followed.

Gradually, the road to the south, the road to Deinze, was filled with one long string of men, women and children, but the real crowded queue only formed a mile or so outside Ghent, so that the guards and the aldermen only became aware something extraordinary was happening in the afternoon, when most families were on their way. The fullers used not one sole gate to leave Ghent, but all the gates, assembling further south.

The aldermen could not be called together before the late afternoon, and by then the departure of the fullers had trickled down to very few families. When a few aldermen had come together in the *Schepenhuis*, and when they had finished crying the fullers were leaving town, which they simply were not allowed to do, almost all the fullers were already walking as fast as they could to Deinze, where despite all odds a camp site had been found, and the tents had been set up. The camp site lay at only four miles of Ghent, so within two hours of walking from the city. The fullers had chosen a large terrain of a small forest near the road, surrounded by pastures that had been left fallow. The fullers and their families began to light their camp fires.

The aldermen of Deinze were alarmed before the ones of Ghent, because they saw the mass of people near their gates. Their gates had been closed rapidly, but they came to take a look at the thousands of men and women, wondering who they were, having noticed rapidly no army had arrived, but normal men with their families. They spoke with the men, heard they were the fullers of Ghent, and they left reassured. The fullers of Ghent did not intend trying to enter Deinze. Their committee did ask for food of the aldermen, which the aldermen consented to bring them, fearing otherwise the fullers would besiege Deinze.

The next day, the aldermen of Ghent met in the *Schepenhuis* with the deans of the guilds.

The First Alderman of the Keure opened the session.

‘The fullers have left the town. They refuse to work. They are on strike. They have assembled at Deinze,’ was all he said.

‘What are they doing at Deinze?’ the ever innocent, older alderman John Hautscilt asked.

‘They are doing nothing, John,’ Gijselbrecht de Grutere explained, not without a smile. ‘They are waiting for us to give them a raise in salary and to call them back.’

‘Well, let them wait,’ Hautscilt replied. ‘But they can’t just be doing nothing!’

‘Oh yes, they are. They are on strike of work.’

‘That is not allowed, and that settles it,’ Hautscilt continued, to the amusement of the other aldermen. ‘The Lord has said we all have to earn our living in our daily sweat.’

‘Have you been sweating much lately?’ de Grutere laughed, for everybody knew Hautscilt lived off the money his parents had left him, and was not the fellow to sweat over anything whatsoever. He had not worked with his hands once in his life.

‘But, but, they’ll starve if they don’t work,’ Hautscilt protested.

‘They say they starve as much when they do work,’ de Grutere retorted. ‘The weavers don’t pay them enough to survive from the income of their work. So, starve for starving, they say, they might as well die in the lovely countryside than in Ghent.’

Hautscilt looked scandalised. He considered himself a hard-working weaver, but he had never much watched out for what was happening outside his workshops, where others worked for

him. He didn't weave himself at all. Three weavers worked on the looms he owned, and for the rest he ate from the fortune of his parents.

'What do the fullers really want?' William Bette intervened impatiently.

'They want more money, what else?' another alderman, who was also a weaver, shouted.

'Why don't you give them what they want?' de Grutere asked.

'We can't do that! We, weavers, cannot offer them what we would agree to in negotiation from man to man. The price of the fullers is fixed by the aldermen. Only the aldermen can grant a salary increase. That has been decided, to have the price of fulling be the same for all the weavers, so that competition remains fair. This agreement protects the fullers from lower prices, because the best fullers would ask much money and the lesser fullers would receive only very little.'

'We definitely don't want to raise wages,' another alderman, also a weaver, said. 'Higher fulling prices means higher prices of cloth, which means we will sell less cloth, pay less taxes, and all that is very bad for the city! Do you want to ruin us?'

Nobody told the prices of cloth would not really go up by so much, for many other processes were needed to make good cloth, but all feared that if the fullers asked more, also the carders, the shearers, the stretchers, the dyers, and so on, would yet ask for more.

The shouting among the men present became worse, until the First Alderman of the Law opened his arms wide and began to shriek louder than anybody else in the hall.

'We must negotiate with the fullers,' he argued. 'We must know exactly what the fullers want. We'll have to grant them some increase of payment!'

'No, no, no,' the weavers groaned. 'Let the fullers where they are! When their money is up, their provisions eaten, within a week or so, they'll crawl back to Ghent on their knees.'

'We can already rule the statute we have been preparing, threatening them with exile and forbid them to carry weapons,' another proposed.

The aldermen nodded in agreement. The resolution for that statute was voted for.

'How many are they, actually?' William Bette asked. 'Does somebody know how many they are? A few tens, a few hundreds? How many have actually left?'

'They are four thousand men or so out here,' the director of the fullers replied. 'They have all gone! Not one fuller can be found in Ghent, well, except for a few elders of over seventy. They have all left, and what is more, they left with their goedendags, shields and swords and even crossbows. What shall we do when four thousand angry men are standing in arms at our walls?'

'We'll crush them,' a weaver called, 'like we crushed them in earlier such revolts. They will be sorry for this!'

'Fine,' de Grutere shouted, 'fine, fine, fine, we'll kill two thousand fullers or so, and then the rest of them will be forced to return, but there will not remain nearly enough fullers in Ghent to do the work. How many weavers, you think, will die in a battle?'

A relative silence fell in the hall. The aldermen did not shout anymore, but they whispered to their neighbours. Fronts frowned more, now, heads bowed, eyes looked at fingers.

'We'll send a delegation of the aldermen to talk with the fullers,' the First Alderman of the Law decided. 'We'll let them cool off for a few days, I would propose, let a few rainy days pass over them, which will make the women angry for the discomfort out there, the babies cry, and then we'll talk with them. Who volunteers to go to Deinze?'

Only one alderman and the clerk Heinric Vresele proposed to go and have a talk with the fullers.

The aldermen decided also to send a delegation of the city to the count of Flanders at Male, to explain the situation of Ghent with the fullers on strike. The alderman Robrecht van Eeke, who was a weaver, and the city's lawyer, would be sent on their way to Male. It was agreed both delegations would leave on the tenth of May. After these decisions, the town council broke up.

In the meantime, at Deinze, the fullers realised they were with too many near that town to find enough food in the neighbourhood. Deinze had grumbled feeding so many people should stop soon. The aldermen of Deinze put pressure on the fullers to march on. A large group of families who found the situation near Deinze untenable, the ones who slept in the mud or had not even a tent to shelter in, left the larger group of fullers, walking on to Oudenaarde. A few days later, yet another large group of families who had remained on at Deinze, walked first to Oudenaarde and then even farther south, to Berchem. About three thousand people of Ghent, good fullers and poorters of the city with their families, remained at Deinze; three thousand more stayed at Oudenaarde, and two thousand got as far as Berchem.

When Heinric Vresele rode to Deinze, accompanying an alderman, he had no illusions about what his discussions with the fullers might lead to. He didn't even know who the leaders of the fullers were at Deinze. He and the alderman were received with derisive laughter and mockery at the camp of the fullers. Children threw stones at them.

It had taken quite a while for Heinric to find the committee of the strikers.

'Have you brought us an offer of salary increase, Clerk Vresele?' the fullers asked after the introductions.

'I have come to discuss the situation,' Heinric tried to win some time. 'What is it exactly you demand? Are you and your families not better off inside the walls of Ghent, in your warm houses, where your freedoms are guaranteed, where you can feed your children, sleep in a soft bed, even if the times are difficult for everybody?'

'We want a serious wage increase,' the fullers responded to Heinric's entreaties. 'You won't take our families as hostages in Ghent! Our families stay with us. We are free men here. If you can't promise an immediate salary increase, you might as well return where you came from. We are beginning to enjoy the countryside. We prefer to starve here, rather than bend under the yoke of the weavers of Ghent.'

The conversation went on for a while, and then the fullers gave Heinric an amount they wanted as price increase. Heinric whistled, for the increase was very high indeed. The fullers did not seem to want to agree on anything less. Heinric and the alderman, who had not said much, but merely looked haughtily and disdainfully at the ragged fullers, returned to Ghent and reported to the town council. They also stated large groups of fullers had reached Oudenaarde and Berchem.

'We may as yet exploit that information,' de Grutere said. 'We might lure one group into Ghent with some promises of wage increase, the other groups will follow suit.'

'No, no, no,' the weavers refused. 'No wage increase! We have to pay so many taxes our profits are almost nil. With a price increase for the fulling process, and increases by the other crafts, the price of cloth will be so high nobody will want to take the cloth off our hands. Our income will be reduced to nothing. Do you want us also to move out to Deinze?'

'Look for other markets, farther away from Flanders,' Aernout van Parijs suggested, 'cut out the Lombard middlemen. Sell other sorts of cloth. Prize the excellent quality of the cloth you sell. Our cloth is still the best of the world!'

'Easier said than done, all that,' the other weavers complained.

The situation remained confused. The aldermen expected the fullers to return by the beginning of the summer, having run out of money, unable to nurture their families. But by mid-July, the fullers still camped where they were, and they showed no intention to crawl back to Ghent.

The weavers then thought it opportune to send a delegation constituted of the two city receivers and representatives of the count to Oudenaarde and Berchem, to hear whether those fullers could not be tempted to return. These fullers, however, cited the same figures of wage increase as the group at Deinze, and they too said no, they wouldn't return for less! No salary increase, no fulling. Moreover, the fullers felt insulted no alderman had felt it necessary to come and discuss with them. On the twenty-seventh of July therefore, the same representatives of the count went back to Oudenaarde and Berchem, but with two aldermen of the city. The answer of the fullers never changed: no substantial wage increase, no fulling. The fullers also reproached the weavers for having committed crimes against some fullers, of having despised them, and having treated them like animals. When the representatives of the count scorned the weavers for such acts, the count still remaining rather severe towards the weavers, these asked Louis of Male to present them real examples of such misdeeds. The dean of the weavers promised the count to punish these men.

The situation became desperate for the fullers, who were indeed starving in their camps, and also for the weavers who continued to produce much cloth but could not sell it, for the cloth was not fullled.

On the fourth of September, the weavers of Ghent asked Count Louis of Male to arbitrate in the conflict, accepting the count's judgement as theirs. The weavers once more promised to punish any weaver who had exerted violence on a fuller. Such men would have to pay heavy fines and could be ejected from the guild. The count's representatives rode to Deinze to negotiate one more time, but they knew already the only solution to the conflict would be to offer a hefty price increase to the fullers, and to have the weavers accept that increase. The count's men negotiated a substantial increase, and by applying the count's authority in the city, they made the desperate weavers swallow the change. The arrangement satisfied the fullers, so they returned to Ghent from September to October of 1373. Many weavers, however, considered the challenges of selling their higher-priced cloth too difficult, so they too now considered leaving Ghent and seek their fortune elsewhere. Some of the fullers had found good work in the countryside. These never returned and took to other crafts. This movement intensified in the years from 1374 to 1380.

John Denout continued to attend to the meetings of the fullers' guild. His remarks, charisma with the men and good advice were soon noticed. He gained great prestige in the fullers' guild.

\*\*\*\*\*

At the beginning of the summer of 1374, the Pharaïldis families received new warnings from the shippers of Clais de Hert, sadly announcing a fourth wave of the pestilence sickness was reaching Flanders. Clais de Hert explained that what had been observed by his captains was uncertain and confusing. The captains were less sure of the tiding than the last time, a mere five years ago, for the people of the port towns along the Leie and the Scheldt in France seemed to indicate far less men and women got sick from this plague, and far less people had died or were dying. Nevertheless, the number of dead rose disquietingly.

The news brought much despair to the Pharaïldis families. Their fortunes were enormous by then, but they had the impression they had worked the last fifteen years or more merely to keep their wealth at the same level. They had at each wave of the sickness had to stop their

activities for many months, and then use the next couple of years to start anew. When they broke contacts with foreign traders, these could not be taken up again, for the traders had found other sources. Many traders had died from the sickness. So, new contacts had to be sought after each wave of the plague, a long, arduous and intensive process.

‘So, we know what to do, we simply do it again,’ I, Jehan Terhagen concluded philosophically. ‘The game is to fight or to die. So, we fight. We are not going to lose good spirit now! More is needed to kill a Pharaïldis! It is not true our fortune has declined. We suffered as much from our known traders having died than from stopping our activities temporarily. The figures we have from our bookkeepers say our wealth has continued to increase. Boudin One and Boudin Two had the hardest time, but they succeeded in yet augmenting our investments. Money is flowing in from our bank, and we invest more. I realise my task has been easier. The prices of grain and of peat, of vegetables and of fish, have risen. The prices of milk and cheese are better, so the produce from our farms has allowed for larger income. Our investments in polders has begun to bring in considerable sums. Our construction business has stagnated, and our brickyards don’t deliver more bricks than before. That is because the population of Ghent is so much lower, but we are exporting bricks to Antwerp and Mechelen, and we are setting up a new brickyard near Antwerp, so we hold our own. No, my friends, our situation is not at all desperate! Many men of Ghent have lost fortunes. Not so we! A new wave of the sickness is coming. What do you want to do? The danger is the same as before! Do you want to face being killed in Ghent? I suggest we do the same as last time. The families from Ghent seek refuge at Beoostenblijje, New Terhagen and Westdorp Manor.’

The Pharaïldis men bowed their head, sighed, were not happy, but by the end of October, their business ventures organised so that they could continue at lower energy throughout the autumn and winter of 1374, and at least until the spring of 1375. They travelled with wagons loaded with their clothes and personal possessions to our country manors.

We passed an agreeable winter. The Pharaïldis women did their best to make our lives comfortable and joyful. They cheered us up, staging even small comedy plays, and citing us from texts. As before, we heard of what happened in Ghent from Evrard and Heinric Vresele. The letters were much more optimistic this time. Far fewer people had been sick and fewer people died from the blackening pustules on their bodies. Only very weak elders and young new-born succumbed. Evrard wrote that, provided the sickness would not suddenly flare up with more energy, fewer than a thousand people would have died in Ghent, and he said he was not at all sure only the sickness had made all of these victims, for the winter had been particularly cold, and Ghent had been lacking peat and wood for the hearths.

At that time, Evrard also wrote us about a strange phenomenon, a movement that had originated in Aachen, in Germany, and that had spread to Flanders. This was a dancing mania, supposed to conjure the sickness and drive it away. Tens to hundreds of men, more rarely women, danced in the streets to the tunes of a few musicians. The people whirled and turned and jumped for such a long time they entered some form of trance, so that they became unaware of the world around them. They danced and danced. Some of the men claimed to dance for Saint Vitus, a Saint venerated for his abilities to cure demonic possessions and sicknesses. The dancing mania became a nuisance for public order, led to debauchery, so the aldermen of Ghent soon forbade participation in the madness on punishment of exile. This ended the mania in Ghent.

Sharp winds indeed froze even the water of our moat at New Terhagen. We did not lack peat, however, I had stockpiled lots of peat at Old Terhagen. We still drew up the drawbridge at night, our gates were closed, and we held guards on the towers, but nobody from Axel came begging at our castle. We had quite more guards these years of 1374 and 1375, for Ruebin and Kerstiaen de Wilde, Ywen's sons, as well as Arent de Handscoemakere, Everdey's son, with Roegier and Zeger van Noortkerke, had grown out to handsome, strong, adult man, who still lived at New Terhagen, but would be engaged to be married to young women of Axel and of the villages around us.

These were youngsters educated by us in the manipulation of weapons by Ywen, Everdey and Mathis, and in reading, counting and other matters by Wivine and by two teachers she had made come over to Old Terhagen. I gave them lessons in management of about everything, for the rules of management were the same for every venture. They were not all extremely smart, though a couple were, and the others made up in honesty and cunning. They could not all live with us at New Terhagen, for we would be with too many people in the castle. I could offer them good jobs as overseers to the Pharaïldis farms near the Scheldt, as managers of our peat productions, brickyards and construction sites. I was thinking of building a village for them with entry to Old Terhagen, a village surrounded by walls, towers and gates. In times of need and urgency they could protect their lives at Old Terhagen or even at New Terhagen. We began to build that project, discussed the plans, drew our streets and bridges over the water, and the boys managed the execution of the plan. A large construction site was put up beside Old Terhagen, slowly transformed into something of a castle of its own. We would win our money back by building more houses than we needed and hoped to attract people to buy in.

In 1375, I lost two very good friends. Ywen de Wilde died, as well as Lammin Metsers, my master mason. Both died with me standing at their bed. Lauwers Christiaens, my other old friend of New Terhagen had then been buried already ten years ago! How fast time went by! I was growing old! The men who had built New Terhagen for me, who had laughed at my youth but shared my dreams, and the first man to stand guard with me in all weather on the walls of new Terhagen, were now deceased and their sons had taken their place. The great luck I had was to have met these honest, hard-working, loyal and very good friends. An era had passed, I thought with melancholy. I was going on sixty. I considered myself a very old man then, with my fifty-six years of age. I stretched my back straight, however. A new generation, among them my son and daughter, both in their twenties now, were ready to take over the task of managing our fortune and our possessions in land. Also the children of Martin Denout and of Clais de Hert were of their age. The Pharaïldis generation would be continued. The children of Boudin Vresele were a little younger than mine, and the children in the de Smet and the van Lake families came next. I wondered how I could hand over the torch of the Pharaïldis tradition, which Boudin and I now wore high.

I calculated the next wave of the pestilence might arrive in Flanders around 1380, maybe even earlier, because the time between the waves shortened, I guessed. I hoped also the trend of the last wave, of the fourth wave, with much less dead people, might continue. Would there be fewer and fewer victims of the sickness? If yes, God had finished scourging our lands. We had been purified. We had suffered. We had lost much, except for our wealth. If God had wanted to chastise us, the Pharaïldis families, too, maybe He had been surprised by how tenacious and resilient we were. I had lost Quintine, the greatest loss I could have suffered. I had never abandoned hope, however, and glory came with the hope of our dreams.

## The War in France and the Great Schism

At the same moment as the fullers of Ghent left their town and went on strike, John of Gaunt launched one of the most terrible raids in France, during which he drew a path of fire, pain, blood and desolation through some of the finest landscapes of the continent. First, however, we must look back a little at what happened earlier, in the years of from 1371 to that terrible campaign of 1373.

In the beginning of the year 1371, Prince Edward of Woodstock, the prince of Wales and heir to King Edward III of England, was so sick he had to return from Bordeaux to England. By October of 1372, the prince of Wales retired a very sick, weak, practically bedridden man, to his castle of Berkhamsted. Unable any longer to govern Aquitaine, his territory dwindling continually by the attacks of the French armies, Aquitaine was given in charge to his brother John of Gaunt, the son of Edward III who was born in Ghent and whose godfather had been James van Artevelde.

In the following year of 1372, John of Gaunt, his wife of Lancaster having died, married Constanza, the daughter and heir of King Pedro the Cruel of Castile. His brother Edmund married her younger sister Isabella. In time, this marriage would make of John also king of Castile, although only in name because the heir of Trastámara reigned in fact. In reality, Castile remained the ally of France.

The appointment to Aquitaine of John of Gaunt could not avoid that ever more regions of his fief in France were conquered by the war lords of King Charles V. The city of Poitiers surrendered, and the Poitou region passed to France. The cities and environs of Angoulême, Saintes, Taillebourg and Saint-Jean-d'Angély, strategically important fortified places, fell to France. In June, an English fleet was destroyed by Castilian ships in front of La Rochelle. This English fleet brought funds and horses to the English army of Gascony, but the Castilian galleys destroyed the English cogs, using for the first time guns in a naval battle. The grand port of La Rochelle was captured by Bertrand du Guesclin. La Rochelle fell in early September of 1372. The Captal de Buch, who led the English garrison in the harbour town, was imprisoned. King Charles V refused to have one of the greatest warriors of England to be ransomed, so the Captal would remain in prison for four years, and die because of his deprivations in 1374.

King Edward III was sixty years old in 1373, and very tired of leading war campaigns in France. Nevertheless, almost at the same time as La Rochelle fell, he assembled a fleet at Sandwich and sailed with four hundred ships and four thousand men-at-arms to France, dragging the very ill prince of Wales with him. The fleet met contrary winds in heavy storms, and was finally thrown back to the coast of England, so that King Edward had to cancel the invasion of France. This would be the last, and aborted, campaign of King Edward III. In the meantime, one after the other of the fortresses around and in Aquitaine were falling to the French, who pushed on and on. The famous superiority of the English in pitched battles had not deterred the French armies from gaining one limited success after the other. If battles did not necessarily mean much territory conquered, this strategy of the French did! The French war lords conquered a place, and garrisoned it. Then, they marched on to next. The French seemed to be eating the English lions piece by piece.

John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, duke after his wife Bianca had died in 1369 and her father the former duke of Lancaster in 1361, had been preparing for a punitive raid into France since long and with great care, gaining even experience at sea. He had been planning such a campaign since three years! John of Gaunt could count on an army of about three thousand

English men-at-arms and three thousand archers, but he thought he might double these numbers by mercenaries and by men from his allies. The main ally of John of Gaunt was Duke John of Montfort of Brittany. John's army grew also with mercenaries from Hainault and Brabant.

The French armies stood under the command of their constable, their *connétable*, Bertrand du Guesclin, but the responsibility of facing John of Gaunt was given to Philip the Bold of Burgundy, married to Margaret of Male and future heir to Flanders.

John of Gaunt marched out of Calais on the fourth of August of 1373. He had to transport several tens of thousands of horses from England, an incredibly large logistic feat. He moved his army to Saint-Omer and then to Arras, hoping to force the French king to a decisive battle and so win the crown of France. His war lords did not hesitate pillaging and destroying abbeys and churches on the way, together with numerous villages.

John expected to give battle near Arras to Philip the Bold, but Philip stuck doggedly to the harassing tactics the French war leaders had developed, and which had brought them success after success. Philip refused a formal battle to John of Gaunt. The duke of Lancaster therefore decided to punish as wide an area as he possibly could, threatening Amiens, the then headquarters of Philip the Bold, and forcing Philip this way to battle.

The English marched south over the Somme, to the town of Roye, which they captured. Roye was burned, as well as other small towns in the environs, and John of Gaunt ravaged the Vermandois while advancing to Paris. He hoped in vain Philip the Bold would throw his army in his path. The town of Ribemont, defended by Sir Giles, lord of Chin, was attacked and taken by the English.

In the beginning of September, the English army changed directions to Laon, no longer threatening Paris. A skirmish fought by a few hundred knights and men-at-arms was fought at Oulchy, but this minor battle remained rather indecisive. The English went on to Châlons-sur-Marne, but passed west of the town without besieging it.

The duke of Burgundy, reinforced with French troops and with the Breton war lord Olivier de Clisson, reached Troyes in mid-September, where also the *Connétable* Bertrand du Guesclin arrived at the end of the month. Philip the bold had by then assembled a considerable army, but he and the *connétable* held to their agreed plan of constant harassing and of refusing battles.

When also King Charles V rode to Troyes, envoys from the pope of Avignon tried to negotiate a truce, for a great battle seemed in the making, but neither the French king nor John of Gaunt were inclined to stop the war and their campaign. King Charles V also refused the formal entreaties delivered by the English high command to give battle.

John of Gaunt then moved east and south, towards Burgundy, hoping this would decide Philip the Bold, leaving Troyes aside, but passing it very closely, within two miles of the French army.

At the end of September, Olivier de Clisson, with somewhat more than one thousand men-at-arms, ambushed a large group of English troops near Sens, killing more than six hundred English and Breton warriors. The English columns crossed the Seine River and then marched on to Burgundy, into the forests of the Morvan, passing Avalon and Auxerre, and then moving on into the Bourbonnais.

Philip the bold and Bertrand du Guesclin followed them southwards, crossing the Loire River at Roanne in the beginning of October.

John of Gaunt in his turn crossed the Allier River, where the English lost many of their wagons, provisions and stocks of armour, spare weapons and arrows. Terrible fighting took place around Moulins, where de Guesclin harassed the troops of John of Gaunt ever more. Parts of the columns of the English threatened the Bourbon and the Berry territories, but John of Gaunt was already heading for Bordeaux, marching through the Auvergne region, passing west from Clermont. It was November by then, and the Auvergne region with its volcanic mountains and deep valleys was very cold. The English suffered, men starved and died from the freezing weather.

The English emerged from the Auvergne, but they lost very many men. They reached the Limoges region, the Limousin, in December. The town of Tulle surrendered to them, then also Brive. The army followed the valley of the Dordogne River to near the town of Sarlat. From a little farther on, the English reached more English-friendly lands, until they showed up at Bergerac. From there, after a raid of more than six hundred miles, John of Gaunt reached Bordeaux a Christmas of 1373, having been harassed by French troops from the first day to the last.

John of Gaunt had lost from one third to half of his men to skirmishes and sickness, and almost all of his horses. It was a bedraggled, motley group of men who marched through the gates of Bordeaux, the knights also walking on foot. The knights had thrown off their heavy armour, and all were starved, dirty and weakened by the deprivations of the long raid. Their pains were not over in Bordeaux, for the troops had little money to pay for food, and also John of Gaunt had no money left. Some men were reduced to begging, and those who still had coins tugged away, no doubt stolen on the way, had to buy their return on ships bound for England by themselves. A few months later, famine and the fourth wave of the sickness ravaged the country further.

Some kind of truce was negotiated between John of Gaunt and Bertrand du Guesclin, a truce which was to last until the autumn of 1374, but the agreement was only reluctantly accepted by King Charles V and remained therefore very relative.

John of Gaunt fled from Aquitaine and from the pestilence in April of 1374. His campaign had realised nothing of lasting political and military importance in France. It had brought terrible pain on the regions the English army had passed through, and it had strained once more the English treasury without tangible results for the aims of the English king.

By the end of 1374, the French armies had captured almost all of Aquitaine, but for the harbour city of Bordeaux. The lack of success of John of Gaunt's *chevauchée* through France caused also great anger in England.

I, Jehan Terhagen, could only return to my lands in the Champagne by mid-1375. I travelled through the Champagne to visit my lands near Vitry, Troyes and Provins. Provins lay unharmed and charming as ever. The devastation of my lands around Troyes and Vitry were total.

I rode through this fine countryside, looking at the villages and the abbeys, weeping almost every day of my inspection tour. All the villages had been destroyed, most burnt to the ground. The fields lay fallow, of course, but I could still discern also traces of burning underneath the wild plants that had grown over the devastation. Trees had been burnt or savagely hacked down, and nothing but charred trunks remained of the vineyards around Troyes.

My two castles had been pillaged, the barns burned down, but the manors and keeps inside had been relatively well preserved. Fire had been put to the roofs, but only in haste, and the fires had stopped quickly. Most of the beams of the roofs were intact.

My two manors, however, were totally ruined. I did not dare to search in the charred remains for the families who had served me well in the previous years, but the few people who had fled and returned, told me my steward had been murdered inside the ruins, as well as his entire family, including his children. He had refused to flee, hoping in vain to appeal to reason with the English troops.

Some of my people had fled, those who remained in their farms or villages had been killed. It would take a large part of my Ghent fortune to rebuild what had been devastated, to start the farms anew. Only one tenth or so of the population that had lived on my lands before had returned and were trying, miserably, to make a new living on what remained of the fields, pastures and vineyards. I felt responsible for them, but I knew I would have to return here for years to start life in these beautiful, sweet landscapes anew.

Once, on a low hill, looking at the run of the lands, I fell on my knees and cursed God for having let this destruction happen without punishing the English lords and troops who had thus scourged innocent peasants. I returned to Provins quite desperate, without doing anything, for I could only remain one to two months in the region, and I would need years to reconstruct. I would have to bring in new stewards and provide them with much money to have my gentlest of lands live again.

In August of 1374, after the expedition of John of Gaunt, King Edward III and King Charles V agreed to send ambassadors to Bruges to negotiate a peace treaty. The talks led to nothing, as the French wanted to hold on to what they had conquered, and feeling themselves on the winning hand they desired to continue the war, whereas the English hammered on the agreements of the Treaty of London, which would mean the French would have to abandon to Edward everything they had won. Both kings suffered from increased illness by that time. The negotiations of Bruges were led by John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster and king of Castile on the English side, and by Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy and heir to Flanders on the French side, the one connected to Flanders by birth and the other by marriage. The two men rivalled in magnificence a Bruges, in pomp of their feasts, banquets, tournaments and splendour of their courts.

The negotiations lasted a long time, many months, and only reached the conclusion of a truce in June of 1375, a truce that was to last one year only.

Despite this truce, the French troops of Bertrand du Guesclin continued their limited but painful actions, leaving only Bordeaux and Bayonne in English hands in Aquitaine, as well as Calais in the north and a few castles in Brittany.

A second peace conference, the continuance of the first, was begun in Bruges in December of 1375, but once more both kings had too much to lose by granting whatsoever to the other side, so the parleys ended in nothing tangible. The war between France and England was to continue.

King Charles V of France had not forgotten his need to rid France from the mercenaries who roamed in his lands, living off the peasantry and the landed lords. He allowed Enguerrand de Coucy to launch a new expedition against the Hapsburgs, with raids into the Alsace and Swiss territories. Coucy did these counties as much harm as the English had done to the French royal domains, his sixteen thousand mercenaries ravaging the country. This campaign brought Coucy little conquered territory. He accomplished little due to the vigorous reactions of the Swiss, except the desired decimation of the mercenary companies. The campaigns of Coucy ended in January of 1376. Some of the mercenary companies were then hired by the pope to

fight in Italy under the command of Cardinal Robert of Geneva. True to their nature, these troops wreaked havoc and terror in Lombardy.

John of Gaunt and Philip of Burgundy continued their meetings on and off at Bruges from 1375 to 1377, negotiating also with the cardinal-delegates of the pope, without much advance. In April of 1376, the English parliament and John of Gaunt accused the chamberlain of the king, Lord Latimer, as well as Sir Peter de la Mare, who much ruled England in the name of the sick Edward III, of crimes against the state. They were dismissed as major counsellors of the king. Also Alice Perrers was attacked by parliament for her influence on the weakening king. She avoided being imprisoned and sentenced on the condition she would not try seeing the king anymore. She retired to one of her castles with her husband, a man she had married in secret.

In June of 1376, the prince of Wales died in the palace of Westminster. King Edward III was by then a tottering, almost senile old man. The power of John of Gaunt augmented in England, though the real heir of King Edward, the new prince of Wales, was Richard, the son of Edward of Woodstock. Richard was only a boy of nine years old, however. John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster and also king of Castile since King Enrique had died in April of 1376, was named the regent over the child. Richard was confirmed as heir during a session of the English parliament of July of 1376, but John of Gaunt declared this meeting of parliament invalid. Lord Latimer was later reinstated as councillor by Richard, the council of nine lords installed by parliament dismissed in its turn, and the former council re-instated, allowing also Alice Perrers back to King Edward III. From this moment on, the English parliament would react rather antagonistically to the royal family.

The peace negotiations at Bruges were transferred from January to June of 1377 at Montreuil near Calais, on the coast of France. The truce between France and England having expired, it was prolonged until June.

At the end of that month, King Edward III died in the palace of Sheen. King Edward had reigned a few months longer than fifty years! His successor was crowned as Richard II, a son of the former prince of Wales by Countess Joan, the Fair Maid of Kent. The boy was then only ten years old.

The truce between France and England ended, the war resumed as of June 1377. The negotiations at Montreuil broke up without result. King Charles V immediately brought the war to England. His Admiral Jean de Vienne attacked the English coast with fifty war ships and a large number of troops of several thousand men. Rye was sacked, as well as Lewes, farther inland. Also Plymouth was assaulted, other harbours such as Portsmouth, Weymouth and Dartmouth, and the Isle of Wight in the next month. In August, Hastings was burnt, but the French were driven back at Southampton. These naval attacks sowed panic in Kent and along the English south coast.

The war in Aquitaine had so far advanced that the English commander for the duchy, Sir Thomas Felton, was defeated and made a prisoner in September of 1377 by the armies of the *Connétable* du Guesclin and the king's brother, the duke of Anjou. Gascony and all the other lands of Aquitaine seemed irremediably lost to the English. Nothing changed this verdict when Sir Hugh Calvely attacked Boulogne in retaliation, burning French cogs and pillaging the town.

The war in France centred henceforth on Brittany and Normandy. In Normandy, Charles de Navarre had allied once more with the English, but the French armies, led by the lords of

Coucy and Sir Bureau de la Rivière, captured one city after the other until practically only Cherbourg resisted, a town that had been sold recently by King Charles de Navarre to the English, and which was held by a strong garrison.

Such was the situation by the end of 1378. France dominated in practically all the counties of Brittany and Normandy. Little remained left to be conquered. The English had been thrown back to the sea, only a few harbours remained in their possession.

By the end of 1378, King Charles V, also being wrecked by illnesses, proposed a new peace tract with England. Once more, he offered to the English crown the lands of Aquitaine south of the Dordogne River, as well as the region and town of Angoulême, with a marriage between Richard II and one of his daughters. The plan did not succeed. In November and December of 1378, the English tried to get the initiative back on their side. The earl of Arundel attacked Harfleur, but he had to retreat in haste when the resistance proved too strong. Later, accompanied by John of Gaunt, the earl attacked Saint-Malo, but equally without success.

The year 1379 saw a few successes by the English, but only minor ones. The French troops were checked in Guyenne by the English under Lord Neville of Raby, and Duke John of Montfort re-occupied large parts of Brittany, chasing the French troops from his duchy. By the end of 1379, the war had reached some form of balance, but the French troops rested only like a wounded predator waiting for the next, final assault.

\*\*\*\*\*

Far-reaching, dramatic developments in the years from 1371 to 1379 involved the papacy. Pope Urban V, who had been warring in Italy to preserve the Papal States, had died in September of 1370, to be followed up by Cardinal Pierre de Beaufort who chose the name of Gregory XI.

In 1371, Bernabò Visconti of Milan had seized parts of the Papal States, and the pope had created a league of several Italian states against the lords who attacked the Holy See. Count Amadeus of Savoy joined this Papal League, using the occasion to war against the Visconti rulers of Milan. Count Amadeus was appointed as captain-general for the papal forces in north-western Italy, in western Lombardy by the pope. Also the mercenary leader John Hawkwood joined the Papal League.

The Milanese troops were led by the son of the Milanese leader, by Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who was merely twenty-one years old. In March of 1371, Count Amadeus VI of Savoy brought an army to Piedmont, accompanied by mercenaries led by Enguerrand de Coucy, who was his cousin. Lombardy was set to fire. Count Amadeus's troops fought the Visconti armies in Lombardy. His troops entered Milanese territory and Hawkwood and Coucy defeated the Milanese army in February of 1373. The war then continued in Lombardy, but when the Savoy army besieged Piacenza in August of 1373, a particularly difficult siege, Count Amadeus fell ill so that the war of the pope came to a halt. The fourth wave of the sickness struck Lombardy then, as it would reach Flanders a year later.

The war in Lombardy was taken up again in May of 1376, when the pope once more hired mercenaries to fight under Cardinal Robert of Geneva. His troops brought terror to Lombardy. The Papal States south and east of Florence were regarded by that city as a threat for Tuscany, so that Florence reacted antagonistically to the power of the popes. John Hawkwood had brought his mercenaries into Tuscany, so that Florence had to buy him off with an extremely high sum of golden Florins. Right after the wave of the sickness in Tuscany, the papal legates

refused the export of grain from the Papal States to Florence, to alleviate the famine in Tuscany. Florence therefore joined the league directed against the pope. The city of Florence, fearing the papal influence at its borders, joined the Milanese troops, the troops of Bologna and of a further number of Italian cities who claimed parts of the Papal States as theirs. Cardinal Robert of Geneva convinced the pope to hire more mercenaries still, with which he attacked Lombardy in May of 1376, having crossed the Alps. In February of 1377, in this war, Cardinal Robert of Geneva and Sir John Hawkwood, acting purely as mercenary leaders or *condottiere*, massacred the population of the Tuscan town of Cesena, for which horrible feat the cardinal received the name of Butcher of Cesena. Robert of Geneva and Hawkwood slaughtered the people of Cesena with closed gates so that no one could escape. About five thousand inhabitants were killed. Florence was excommunicated by the pope, and this war also petered out shortly after.

Since June of 1376, the Dominican nun Catherine of Siena, had been exhorting the pope to return to Rome, and to begin a reform of the Holy See. In September of 1376 therefore, Pope Gregory XI, a very pious man, indeed returned to Rome, but he died in March of 1378.

The Romans exerted strong pressure on the cardinals in conclave to elect no more a French cardinal to the papacy. The cardinals chose the Archbishop of Bari therefore as the new Pope Urban VI. Urban VI began his reign by reproaching the cardinals for their simony, debauchery, licentious way of living, for their tremendous wealth and for their absence from their diocese. He forbade them to sell indulgences or spiritual grants of the church for large sums of money, and he prohibited them from accepting gifts of money from the lords of the country. He ordered the cardinals to restrict their meal to one course. Pope Urban VI also refused to return to Avignon, and began to enforce a strict reform of the church, for which he made many enemies among the cardinals.

In July of 1378, a number of cardinals left Rome for Avignon, where on the ninth of August, they declared the election of Urban VI void. Urban was called an anti-Christ, a demon, a devil and a tyrant. The cardinals subsequently moved to Fondi in the territory of Naples, where in September of 1378 they elected a new pope, no cardinal less than Robert of Geneva, the butcher of Cesena, who chose the name of Clement VII. Robert of Geneva was loathed throughout Italy, so many nobles of Rome and of Italy remained faithful to Urban VI, however strange and, irrational the man might act. Robert of Geneva hired mercenaries to march on Rome, but his forces were defeated by other mercenaries fighting for Urban. Clement VII had to flee, sought refuge with Queen Joanna of Naples, but even there a mob forced him to escape surreptitiously from Naples.

In November of 1378, King Charles V, having summoned scholars and astrologers to counsel him on the matter of the two popes, chose for Clement VII as pope. Henceforth, the Catholic Church of Saint Peter would have two popes, one reigning in Rome and one in Avignon, and a tragic period started in Roman Catholicism which became known as the Great Schism. France had chosen to support Clement VII, but England, the Holy Roman Empire of Germany and Flanders remained loyal to Pope Urban VI.

By April of 1379, Pope Clement VII was back at Avignon. Clement rewarded the French. He issued a papal bull by which he appointed the duke of Anjou, one of the brothers of the king of France, to reconquer the Papal States in Italy, for which services the duke would receive the kingdom of Adria as a fief. The duke of Anjou was also called to become the heir of the childless Queen Joanna of Naples. In April of 1379, the nomination of Clement VII to pope was feasted with magnificent ceremonies and banquets in Paris.

Once more, Flanders distanced itself from France, for Count Louis of Male remained Urbanist. He vowed for the popes of Rome, not of Avignon.

The Great Schism was a scourge for the European countries, for the catholic clergy was divided and confused over the internecine struggle between the popes. It was the fifth seal that had been opened, the other having been the waves of the sickness, the revolts of the peasants, the war between France and England, and the devastating roaming Free Companies of mercenaries.

The fourteenth century was thus indeed a time in which all values seemed to have been corrupted. This could not have been the working of God, the people told, for at least the papacy would have been saved. Had the world now totally fallen prey to the workings of the devil?

## Epilogue

Late in the winter of from 1378 to 1379, in the month of February, although a bitter wind blew in strong, freezing gusts in the plains around Axel, I, Jehan Terhagen, asked for a meeting of the Pharaïldis group, knowing the members of our families did not care about the weather, travelling in cold and rain as in sunlight and sweet breezes. I had a few announcements to make.

We met in the great hall of the castle of New Terhagen, but some men and women of our families had found lodging at Beostenblijje and at Westdorp Manor. We started our conference in the late morning. I did not want the talks to last very long, so that everybody could travel to where they would pass the night during the light of day. We would feast with a banquet the next day, also from late in the morning till before nightfall.

I started my speech by welcoming everybody. The men and women of our families sat or stood around me.

I began solemnly, ‘I have asked for us all to meet to announce to you a few changes in my family. I thought these announcements were urgent, for we have to make certain arrangements for our lands. As you know, I have worked much to enhance our properties north of Ghent, both in quality as in quantity. We have held meetings during which Martin Denout and I have presented our financial results. I have been made heir to the states of the de Vitry family of my mother in the Champagne region of France. These lands are still lying waste, abandoned, in ruins, after the last campaign of the English troops of Prince John of Gaunt, now five or six years ago, and I feel strongly I must honour my mother and her legacy. I had an excruciating decision to make, but after long discussions with my wife, Wivine Denout, and with my children, as well as with certain among you, I have made up my mind for what means a drastic change of life for me and my family, and for modifications in the leadership of our consortium.

As of the spring of this year of 1379, I, Jehan Terhagen, my wife Wivine and my daughter Kerstin, will move definitely to our manors near the city of Provins in France. I’ll live in one of my castles there, which has not been ruined by the passing armies. Our daughter Kerstin will accompany us, but she will marry beforehand her friend of many, many years, Zeger van Noortkerke, the son also of my dear friends. Mathis van Noortkerke and his wife, Anna de Cleyne, have been our guards and friend at New Terhagen since very long, and they accepted to accompany us to Provins and to share our fate there. Mathis and Anna will be stewards for

us at Provins. Their son and my daughter Kerstin will one day inherit my possessions in France, so Zeger and I will work closely together. I have to teach everything I know about managing estates to Zeger. My future so-in-law is a thoughtful, loyal, intelligent, kind and just man. With Kerstin, I believe they have all the capabilities necessary to uphold the de Vitry estates in France and build further generations.

When I leave New Terhagen, the castle will be run by my son, William Terhagen, who has confessed he would equally like to marry soon. He wishes to wed Agneete Vresele, the daughter of my great friend and brother Boudin Vresele. So, my children are readying for a life of happiness and love. I hope there will be many grandchildren to Wivine and me and to our good friends of the Vresele and Noortkerke families. I am proud to have had such children, and I am quite pleased with my son-in-law and daughter-in-law.'

I paused for a few moments, and then continued.

'To William and to Agneete, I shall make over my estates in and near Ghent. They will remain here as lords of New Terhagen. William is also a quite capable and intelligent young man. I am confident he will continue the name of Terhagen and Vresele with honour. By the marriage of my children, the circle has been rounded, our links to the Vresele will henceforth be by blood, which I am particularly pleased with. I will soon be ready to depart from this world, my succession thus arranged for the largest part. We will celebrate the marriages in early spring in Ghent, before I and Wivine will ride to Provins. I hope you will all be able to feast with us. Of course, I am not saying farewell to you, for we intend to come back often to Ghent from Provins and tell you how we are doing in France.'

I was thirsty, drank, interrupted, looked a while at the Pharaïldis men. They sat with frowned fronts.

'And what about the estates of the Pharaïldis group, you will ask. In agreement with Boudin Vresele, John de Smet, Boudin van Lake, Martin Denout and Clais de Hert, the new manager of the Pharaïldis estates will be Martin Denout. Martin has amply proven he can favourably replace me. His assistant will be my son William.

I have, I believe, sufficient funds in ready money of my own, in the de Vitry heritage to invest money in the rebuilding of the de Vitry estates, for Zeger van Noortkerke and my daughter Kerstin. If need be, I may have to withdraw a little money out of the Pharaïldis consortium, but I don't think it will be necessary. I will probably – so help me God – add to our common funds again from out of the de Vitry fortune when the fields begin anew to bring produce. We have grain fields and vineyards in the Champagne, and I hope to be sending you soon some of our red wines.'

My real announcements having been finished, I made a sterner face.

'My friends, I am feeling old! I am sixty years of age now. At that age, I am put before an entirely new challenge, starting something up again, which excites me to the energy of youth. Nevertheless, the burdens of all the sorrowful, horrible events of the last years weigh heavy on my mind! Such burden, of course, is unknown to young people, and that is good. I have known men, women and especially young, totally innocent children to die in pain and desperation from the sickness with which God punished our world. It is not a pretty sight to see a child die from the terrible sickness that has haunted us. God punished our world with the plague, I am sure of that. I have also heard of the killing by the sword of so many people, some among our best business contacts in France and Germany. My beloved Quintine died too soon. The incessant struggles between some of the crafts in our own town of Ghent, the destructions brought about by the companies of mercenaries in France, the raids of the

English in my lands, the tensions between Flanders and Brabant and between Flanders and France, have affected me much. The betrayal by business partners, the never-ending envy by so many people of Ghent for what we accomplished, made of me a rather pessimistic, gloomy, maybe even cynical man, and that is an attitude I would like to get rid of before I die. I would like to die at peace and not in tension. It is time therefore that for my most important work, the management of our estates, I hand over the lighting torch to whom can brandish it better, with more magnificence and eager.

Friends, I could never accept or be accustomed to the beastly nature of some men. I wish my children never to be harassed by evil man and women, by injustice, but I know they will not be able to avoid confronting them at some moments of their lives, so I believe we must teach our children not only the beautiful things of our world, but also teach them how to confront the ugly ones. I admit to you I still do not comprehend how God could create evil with the good for the creatures he placed on this world. My rational thought is too small to comprehend this, but I am tired of reproaching God for having let so much suffering happen in our times. I suppose the suffering will go on, despite the good will of people like us. I hope our children can face the dark forces of the creation and defeat them. For that, much love is needed! I made my son and daughter swear never to participate in any war or battle. I find these surges of violence utterly stupid, when so many other ways exist to persuade people to settle their differences.

Why does egoism, unscrupulous ambition and evil rule our world? You, young men, you are too preoccupied with your daily tasks, and that is good! You cannot imagine how short life is. You think you will live forever, don't you? Only the beautiful things hold true value! I suppose you have more the right to believe in a fine world than old, cantankering men like me. Other considerations than the tiredness and the cynicism of an old man drive the young. So, my time has come to hand over my work in Flanders, which is accomplished, to others, and to start with my last forces something new and prepare the way for my daughter and son-in-law.

This also a moment of giving my dearest thanks to you all, for you have given me much love and respect, friendliness and sweet thoughts, loyalty too, which have warmed my heart!

When I had thus finished my short speech, the Pharaïldis men and women first held a stunned silence, then they applauded me, and we embraced. Most of them had already understood what I would propose, others had no idea what I had wanted coming up with.

Wivine broke the awkwardness by bringing in our wine, helped by our maids of the guard families, and we cheered the marriages that would be feasted soon. I had also insisted Agneete Vresele to be present, so we brought our cups high to William who stood with an arm around the waist of shyly smiling Agneete, and to Zeger who held the blushing Kerstin.

‘I am a little surprised,’ the monk Evrard Vresele, who was of my age, whispered to me a little later when we stood somewhat isolated, aside, watching the buzz but not really participating in it. ‘I would have thought you would have wanted to marry your son and daughter to the sons and daughters of knights, of lords, maybe to the offspring of landowner-poorters and knights of Ghent. They will be married to common people! You could have sought a nobleman for your daughter, a noble woman for your son.’

‘I was saved by a common man before I knew of the difference,’ I smiled to Evrard. ‘Gillis taught me the values that really matter in life. I esteem higher, like the Vreseles, the nobility of the mind than the nobility of the blood, and I have often remarked the blood of a nobleman is no different from the blood of a common man. I do not wish the arrogance of nobility for my children. My children chose their loved ones, and that is the best guarantee of a marriage that respects the commands of God!’

‘It is, it is, a wise decision,’ Evrard agreed. ‘I am about as old as you, Jehan, and I also seek peace and rest, although I want to continue being a priest and a monk. A new generation of younger monks now rules at the Fremineuren, and I have to confess I do not agree well with them. You are building a new village at Terhagen. Do you think your son would accept me as his priest for Old and New Terhagen? I need only a small place in the castle, maybe a little house in the village. I suppose there will be a church.’

I smiled, for Evrard turned my hands, but I answered with good nature, ‘yes, Evrard, we will build a chapel in the village. I think my son and his wife will be delighted to have a priest and their uncle near. A priest was what we lacked at New Terhagen. I would be relieved hearing my son and new daughter would have a fine counsellor as you at their side while I’m at Provins.’

‘I’ll ask them,’ Evrard nodded, and he moved instantly to William, his cup of wine in his hand.

Boudin Vresele strolled up to me when he had seen Evrard leave.

‘Do you think there will come a fifth wave of the sickness?’ Boudin wondered.

‘I don’t really know,’ I replied, sighing. ‘The sickness seems to have petered out, because it was not so powerful the last time. We, The Pharaïldis families should not fear anymore, though. By isolating us, we have been able to ward it off. We know what should be done. What we must do is isolate our families efficiently and consistently. As equally important was being warned in time of its coming. Our shipper family had been very useful in that. These two measures have sufficed for us to survive quite well, though we had to mourn losses too. If you continue to observe these measures rigorously, you will not be harmed.’

Clais had joined us, he had heard my last words.

‘Our worries are not over yet,’ Clais de Hert remarked.

‘The weavers and the fullers continue hating each other,’ Clais continued, ‘for reasons of money in the first place, for reasons of political power in the city too. These reasons are very stupid, really, for the two guilds depend on each other in vital ways. When such tension hangs in the air, an outburst of violence may flare up. That worries me! Our families are not safe in Ghent when a new revolt comes, and we may be drawn into the violence.’

‘You are right,’ I agreed. ‘A violent revolt will come! The antagonisms are too sharp, have not ended with the fullers receiving more money for their work from the count. The weavers also blame Count Louis, now. I can only counsel you to stay away from it. Leave Ghent with your families, with all the people of the Pharaïldis families. You know where to go too. A revolt in Ghent can become as deadly as a new wave of the sickness in all its virulence. Hide in your castles and manors, all of you, until the danger is over. Be smart! You can avoid it now, you are wealthy enough, and you have places to leave to.’

‘Should we not defend our city?’

‘Of course you should, but do not mix in quarrels among people of our same town!’

‘I’m afraid Count Louis of Male once again may become restless,’ John de Smet, who was ten years my elder, now tall, lean, thin, with a very wrinkled face uttered. ‘He has become an arrogant, haughty man of power, now! He has won everything he wanted, except a son, his authority is unchallenged, and he seems to think these days, contrary to how he thought when he was younger, that everything he ever does is both his due and cannot but be won by him. I wonder when he is going to hit a wall, learning that no, he cannot have everything he wants his way. Also, he has gained all he ever wanted to pursue as goal. There is nothing as terrible in having a dream as the dream come true and no pursuing of a goal necessary anymore. He will seek new goals, whatever they may be, maybe new intrigues, and, take my word for it, he will have new wars and battles!’

‘Maybe, maybe not,’ I replied, shaking my head. ‘I would propose the same answer as I gave earlier: have the Pharaïldis men and women stay out of such conflicts, as will surely come. The conflicts are the count’s, not yours! We must remain discreet and remain aloof of the conflicts of the high lords of our world. We can gain nothing, and certainly no peace of mind and no happiness, no increasing of our fortunes by mixing in those wars too.’

‘You seem to believe increasingly our fortunes are important for our happiness,’ Evrard countered me, ‘yet, Christ said it was more difficult for a man of wealth to enter the kingdom of the heavens than for a camel to pass the needle’s eye.’

‘Ture, true,’ I agreed, ‘true for common-minded men. We are not common-minded men, Evrard! We have arrived at a degree of wisdom as very few people have attained in Ghent. Very few indeed! We know how to gain and manage a fortune and yet live without arrogance, realising much sorrow can any moment befall on us. We know how to use God’s means, our mind and our possessions, to bring goodness to around us, to save and preserve the ones we love. We respect our religion, but let neither religion nor money lead us. When you are wise, it is far more difficult for a wanting, poor man, to enter through the eye of a needle, than for us. We know what we have to do to get through the needle’s eye. That is why, Evrard, we still need you desperately, and men like you, to show us God’s way, even if we are scourged by God. You must be courageous with William and Wouter, Gillis, John, Raes, and Aernout of the newest generation. Scorn them, chide them, Evrard, whip them to wisdom! Keep them away from participating in stupid wars and battles and fights!’

‘That I will do to the best of my abilities,’ Evrard smiled.

While the Pharaïldis families stayed on, discussing the political situation of Ghent and of Flanders, the state of our businesses, exchanging ideas about what the Pharaïldis group should invest in next, I looked at them with much melancholy and nostalgia. I saw many other good and formidable men standing behind them, the patriarchs of the Pharaïldis who had deceased, their image blurred, but they were there! Yes, these men were still with us! Why was it I alone could sense their presence?

I could no longer feel much interest for what the men and women were discussing. They might be discussing the wrongs of the world, believing the wrongs were always put to right in the end. Does right always triumphs ultimately? That is what Jesus Christ made us believe. But were the wrongs righted in our lifetime? Maybe they weren’t!

Yes, I was old, and when life interests you so little, you may feel death approach. I hoped I would not die too soon, however. I had still so much to do! I would like to see my grandchildren grow up, the plants open up in flowers each year, the grass of pastures to turn from dirty brown to splendid bright young green in spring, the trees sprout leaves, the snow covering white the run of the hills of Flanders and of the Champagne, feel the water under my heels when I walk in the polders, wander between the neat rows of vines, feel the warmth of the sun, the taste of sweet wine, and know the love of Wivine is with me.

The only real, nagging, lasting pain in my heart and mind remained the absence of my Quintine, but it would not take long, now, before I would be able once more to hold her in my arms!

## Author's Notes

'The City – The Scourge' is a work of fiction filling the empty space within the written lines of history. I tried as much as possible to remain within what historians know as fact of Ghent in the fourteenth century, filling with fiction the gaps about which we know nothing. The Vresele, de Smet, Denout, van Lake and the de Hert families, the guards at New Terhagen, are pure fiction.

The de Mey and van Merlaer families existed and were antagonistic to the van Artevelde, according to David Nicholas' book on James and Philip van Artevelde. How members of that family have been used in this novel is purely fictional. I merely borrowed the names. Readers of my other novels will recall the characters of Vitry in 'Star Seeker – Aleppo'. I needed figures from France, not too far from Flanders, from lands English raiders had devastated. The episode illustrates how far the trade negotiations and contacts of the merchants of Ghent reached into France.

The year did not begin on the first of January in the Middle Ages, but finding the consistent use of Easter as the start of a new year too cumbersome for the good understanding of the stories, I let the years mentioned in the novel start as of the first of January, as we are currently used to.

The pattern of streets of Ghent in the fourteenth century has been retained much to the present day, and so have even the names of the streets. The Friday Market is still called as such, as well as the Fish Market, the Corn Market, the *Reep*, the *Kalanderberg*, the *Veldstraat*, the *Hoogpoort*, and so on. This means one can very much use a contemporary map of Ghent and locate the streets mentioned in the text.

The earliest map of the streets of Ghent is a map of 1534. I used a map of 1559, drawn by Jacob van Deventer. A list of streets of the fourteenth century and where they run today or ran, has been presented in the first book of this series, 'The City – Rebellion'.

For place names, I used in this novel as much as possible the names in the language of the region, with a few exceptions. So I generally used Ieper instead of Ypres (the French name of the town used also in English) and the Leie instead of the Lys (French). I allowed for exceptions when the names were too well-known in English, such as Bruges (the French name for Brugge), Ghent (for Gent in Dutch) and the Scheldt (for the Dutch Schelde).

The castle of Tervuren, a castle of the duke of Brabant, where Louis of Male resided for about one month in 1346, recovering from his wounds after the Battle of Crécy, does not exist anymore. It was demolished in 1782 on orders of Emperor Joseph II who then ruled over Brabant. At the site, in the nineteenth century, King Leopold II of Belgium built the Colonial Palace, as a pavilion of the World Fair of Brussels of 1897, to hold African, mainly Congolese, cultural artefacts. When the palace became too small, only a few years later still, the current Royal Museum for Central Africa was erected, on plans of the French architect who also designed the '*Petit Palais*' in Paris.

The castle of Male dates from the twelfth century. It still stands in the commune of *Sint-Kruis*, part of greater Bruges. The proud, elegant residence of the counts of Flanders was demolished, plundered and rebuilt several times. Very little, if nothing, remains of the castle's aspect in the fourteenth century. The castle has known several owners of the nobility. From

1954 to 2011 it was a convent, the Saint-Trudo Abbey. Currently, it is the private property of a Flemish industrialist.

Count Louis of Male had many mistresses. No less than eight bastard sons and daughters are known of him, from three different women whose names are mostly unknown. His love story with Heyla de Smet is fiction, as well as her children, and so is his gift to her of the manor of Beostenblijje. Beostenblijje was one of the now drowned and currently disappeared villages near Axel, not a manorial domain, and therefore only a fictive gift of Louis of Male to the fictive character of Heyla de Smet. Nevertheless, the name of Beostenblijje has existed.

A master mason or a master carpenter might have earned about ten pounds groot per workday in the 1370's, eight pounds groot in the 1360's (see David Nicholas in 'The Metamorphosis of a Medieval City – Ghent in the Age of the Artevelde, 1302-1390', University of Nebraska Press, 1987), whereas about 7 pounds groot might have been necessary for a family of four to live on. The value of one pound groot (Flemish currency) was equivalent to about three pound Inghelse and 12 pound Parisis.

I could find only very little information about the strike of the fullers in 1373, although this was one of the first major strikes in the history of Flanders. This paragraph is therefore much due to my imagination. The strike did happen, though, with large groups of fullers leaving the town, several delegations of the town magistracy being sent to them, the arbitrage of the count having been called in, with the result the fullers returned after they had been promised a substantial wage increase. I found it remarkable strikes already took place in the fourteenth century in Gent.

For the War of Succession of Brabant, in addition to the texts mentioned in the first novel of this series, I was particularly indebted to:

- 'La guerre de la succession du Brabant (1356-1357)', by H. Laurent and F. Quicke in *Revue du Nord*, t. 13, n° 50, 1927.
- 'Histoire de Comtes de Flandre jusqu'à l'avènement de la Maison de Bourgogne, Tome II', by Edward Le Glay, Comptoir des Imprimeurs Réunis, Paris, 1843.
- 'Geschiedenis van Brabant' by J. David, Van Linthout & Co. editors, Leuven, 1855.

For a book on the raid of John of Gaunt of 1373, try:

- 'The great Chevauchée – John of Gaunt's Raid on France in 1373' by David Nicolle, Osprey Publishing Ltd, Oxford, 2011.