The Ivy and the Arrows.

Prologue.

Calais, 19 years earlier, then an English possession.

A lot was riding on this. The widower Richard II was marrying Isabella of Valois, eldest surviving daughter of Charles VI, King of France. The hope was that it would bring lasting peace between the two countries but it was a gamble. Isabella was six years old and consummation would have to wait until she was 12.

The candlelight caught on the gold of the table settings, and the air was thick with violets, wine, and wax. From the upper gallery, minstrels played slow airs in the old Provençal style, while servants moved between the tables like shadows bearing silver trays. The hall was warm, despite the October chill beyond the shutters.

Edward of Norwich, lean and unsmiling, sipped white wine from a heavy cup and watched the room. He was young, but not as young as some — not as fresh-faced as the new bride, not as over-laughing as the French squires who jostled and posed along the walls.
Across the hall, seated near the Burgundian delegation, a taller figure leaned back in conversation with the Duke of Bar. Antoine of Brabant, dark-haired, already broad across the chest, dressed in cloth-of-damask with a hunting hawk stitched at his shoulder. He moved like a man more used to stables than court — his laughter quiet but genuine.

They met by chance near the almond trees in the lower gallery. There had been a spill — a servant had dropped a platter of sugar-dusted figs — and both men stepped back at the same time to avoid the wreckage. Their eyes met. One inclined his head.

> “Norwich,” Antoine said, in French.

> “Brabant,” Edward replied.

No one else was near enough to overhear.
They exchanged nothing more than small talk — the hawks flown that morning, the quality of the Burgundy, the likelihood of frost. But the ease between them was real. They were both used to being watched, and both briefly relieved not to be.

Before parting, Antoine gestured toward a painted screen behind which the musicians were tuning.

> “Your king’s young bride plays the lute,” he said. “Not well. But softly.”

Edward allowed the ghost of a smile.

> “That’s the better way to fail.”

They never corresponded. Never met again, as far as record shows.

Richard died in 1399. He had no direct heirs.

Present day

June, Forêt de Soignes

The month arrived with its usual restlessness in the stables and stud farm in the forest. The foals were strong that year, the farriers busy, and the grooms short-tempered with the shifting weather. Antoine, Duke of Brabant, spent his mornings walking the paddocks and his afternoons in correspondence, neither wholly committed to either.

To most of his court, he appeared content — engaged in the rhythm of the land and the business of horses. But beneath that calm, there was motion. War was gathering across the water, and though Brabant was not formally at war with England, Antoine's name was already being whispered among those preparing to defend France.

The duchy itself stood uneasily between loyalties. Antoine was a Valois by blood, a Burgundian by inheritance, and a vassal of the Empire in title. He held his lands through imperial grace but moved in a courtly world aligned to the French crown. His elder brother, John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, had withdrawn from the French court, leaving Antoine as the more acceptable face of Burgundian diplomacy — for now.

In the capital, the Armagnacs were tightening their grip. In Paris, his brother was hated. In Dijon, he was obeyed. And Antoine, caught between these centres of power, did what men of his rank often did in such times: he waited, he watched, and he listened to the silence between letters.

There was no summons from Charles VI, no direct call to arms. But there were inquiries. Discreet messages from the Dauphin's household. Muted appeals from the Counts of Foix and Alençon. Most had little weight. Some had more. All arrived carefully worded, as if unsure of which way the duke might lean.

And then there was the ivy.

That summer, it had begun creeping through the lower paddocks, climbing the stone walls of the old hunting lodge, thickening beneath the hedges that lined the approach to the stud. The gardeners complained, and the stable hands cursed it when it tangled in the lead ropes. It had not been so wild before but the uncharacteristic dampness that year had spurred on its growth. Antoine noticed it, but distracted, gave no instruction for its removal.

Instead, he saddled up and leaving the haras via the Chemin du Saut des Loups rode into the forest with Faulx, his favoured hunting horse, his meute, or pack of hunting dogs, in search of game.

June, England

In England, the air in June was thick with planning. Ships were being counted at the Cinque Ports. Armourers in London and York worked past sunset. Men were called up by writ,

horses registered, carts tallied. Henry V was preparing for war, and those closest to him were expected to prepare with equal seriousness. Edward of Norwich, Duke of York, did not have to be told twice.

Edward was no longer young and had inherited the title of Duke of York in 1402. He had been in and out of favour under three kings and had learned the virtues of prudence, silence, and timely loyalty. In Parliament he was steady; in council, deferential; in war, competent. He knew the French coast well, had seen sieges and ambushes, and had carried the burden of command before. He was not a man to rouse passions, but he was trusted. That counted for more.

His claim to nobility was beyond question. Grandson of Edward III, cousin to Henry V, and once heir presumptive under Richard II, he had drifted through the last decades like a shadow of past glories. He was wealthy, titled, and landholding, yet something in him remained provisional — a prince without a principality. Some still whispered about his claim to the throne, but not within earshot. Edward never encouraged it.

He lived at Fotheringhay, but in June he was mostly in Westminster and Windsor, attending the king's council and confirming troop levies in the north. He dined regularly with the king, consulted with the chancellor, and offered quiet counsel where needed. He did not speak often, but when he did, Henry listened.

There was no question of whether Edward would go to France. The only question was how far into France he would be asked to ride, and how many men he would be expected to lead. He read the king's mind better than most. Henry would land hard, take a fortified port, and march to Calais still under English control — a measured demonstration of strength before winter.

Landing directly at Calais, a safer option, was thought to be defensive, a sign of weakness and Henry wanted to go on the offensive. With his army and fleet already mustered in Southampton, Normandy, across the narrow sea was to be the target, and in particular, the port of Harfleur. This statement of intent would, he reasoned, draw the French into the open. Henry could not afford a protracted invasion, not financially nor politically. Edward had been on campaigns before. He had seen how quickly they soured. But Henry had clarity, and men followed clarity. Edward did not need glory. He needed purpose. And this war, for now, offered that.

July, Antoine

In July, the letters became more frequent. Word of English preparations had spread across the courts of Flanders and France, and though no battle had yet been fought, many now spoke of war as a certainty. The names of those expected to fight were circulated in corridors and councils. Antoine's was not among them. He had received no formal summons from the French crown, nor any demand from the Empire. Yet his absence from the lists did not go unnoticed.

In the Forest, the stud farm continued its work. The foals were nearing weaning. Yearlings were being trained to the halter. The duke made time to observe them, walking the lines in the early hours, speaking little. He was not idle, but he had grown more inward. Messengers

came and went from Brussels and Leuven, and more than one arrived bearing the seal of Dijon.

His brother, John the Fearless, remained cautious. Though Duke of Burgundy and cousin to the king of France, John had refused to join the royal army. He had his own interests in Paris and his own quarrels with the Armagnac faction. Antoine, as his younger brother, bore the weight of that political ambiguity. He was expected to show loyalty to France without drawing Burgundy into war. That balance was difficult to maintain.

There were other voices. The Count of Nevers had written. So had the Duke of Bar. Both would ride for the French crown, and both had asked, indirectly, whether Antoine would be among the banners. He answered politely but noncommittally. In truth, he had not decided.

Brabant itself remained at peace. The towns paid their dues. The merchants grumbled over grain prices but kept their gates open. The guilds in Brussels were uneasy, wary of war drawing trade away from the Scheldt and Meuse. They did not wish their duke to go, but they would not oppose him if he did.

And still the ivy thickened. The gardeners began cutting it back, but each morning new tendrils had risen along the old chapel wall and the rootstock barns. One groom claimed to have seen it curling across the paving stones toward the main stable gate. Antoine said nothing, but in the evenings, he began to sit longer near the windows that faced the lower paddocks. He watched the light change across the roof tiles, and listened to the horses breathe in the warm dark.

July, Edward

By July, Edward of Norwich was firmly at the king's side. The expedition to France had shifted from planning to execution. Muster rolls were being finalised. The fleet lay ready in the Solent, anchored off Southampton. Supplies were being loaded daily — casks of wine, salted meat, bowstrings, siege timber, and arrow shafts by the thousand.

Edward had been given command of one of the main divisions of the army. It was not a surprise. He was the most senior peer in England after the king, a veteran of earlier campaigns, and his loyalty was not in question. His role was administrative as much as martial: confirming levies, overseeing ship allotments, and advising Henry on the order of battle.

Southampton grew crowded. Nobles and their retinues arrived by the day. Tents sprang up in meadows outside the town, and every inn and hall was taken. Armourers clanged from before dawn. Priests muttered blessings and kept fasts. Edward stayed in lodgings close to the king's own quarters. He dined frequently with Henry, but spoke little outside council. He preferred to watch.

There were rumours, of course — there always were before a crossing. Some men wagered on how far the king would go. Others worried about provisions, or plague, or the weather. But among the inner circle, the king's intention was plain: land at Harfleur, take the town swiftly, then march to Calais as a show of strength. If the French wanted battle, they could have it. If not, Henry would hold his ground and wait.

It was not yet known — not publicly — that a conspiracy was taking shape inside the English camp.

Edward had heard whispers. He knew Richard of Cambridge was restless, and that Lord Scrope had been unusually reserved. Grey of Heton had passed messages too quietly. But nothing had yet emerged, and Edward was not inclined to report shadows.

He had other matters to consider. The horses from his Yorkshire estates had arrived, lean but strong. His captains were finalising the list of men-at-arms. His own armour had been inspected and repaired. He had commissioned no new banner — he would ride under the colours of York, as always.

If he felt unease, he did not show it. He moved among the men with calm and order, speaking with clerks, scribes, and quartermasters. His task was not to inspire but to ensure. He did both.

And yet, behind the order, something had begun to creak.

August, Antoine

August opened with heat and dust. The summer was dry, and the horses drank more than usual. The stables grew close in the afternoons, thick with the scent of oiled leather and sun-warmed hide. The ever present flies bothered the horses' mouths and eyes despite the application of Tansy, Wormwood and Rue to the horses' muzzles. The Ivy, cut back the previous month, returned with more vigour. It found the stone guttering now and began to creep beneath the roof slates of the east barn. The gardeners could not explain it. Antoine did not ask them to. He was brought up with the omens and knew full-well the portent of the Ivy.

Word from France had grown more urgent. Henry of England had landed at Harfleur with a substantial army — well supplied and accompanied by heavy artillery. The English king had wasted no time with skirmishes or declarations. He had come directly, with siege in mind.

The news spread quickly. In Paris, the court panicked. In Rouen, priests called for penance. In Dijon, John the Fearless remained silent. And in Brussels, Antoine sat at council with merchants and guildmasters and spoke only of taxation and tariffs.

He had still received no official summons from Charles VI. The French crown, deeply divided, had issued contradictory orders to its vassals. The Duke of Berry called for a levy in the south; the Count of Armagnac issued musters in the north. The royal command, such as it was, came not as a call to duty but as a scramble for influence. Antoine had no wish to be caught in the gears of another man's ambition.

And yet he read every letter. He marked the progress of the English siege on a map. He noted which French lords had raised banners and which had not. The Duke of Alençon was preparing to ride. So too the Duke of Bar and the Count of Vendôme. Their names circled like hawks over the parchment.

He had his own duties. The duchy was stable, but not invulnerable. If he left, the estates would fall to the council — prudent men, but cautious. In Paris, the legality of war between

Christian princes was hotly debated.. The merchants in Antwerp urged neutrality, fearing the impact on the lucrative trade with England; those in Tournai spoke more freely in favour of France. His subjects watched and waited, just as he did.

In the evenings, he walked the edge of the wood that bordered the haras. The ground there was mossy, dry but shaded. He thought often of his father, and of the courts of Paris in his youth. His French was still the French of poets, though he rarely used it now. He had not yet declared himself. He still had time.

But the ivy's leaves had reached the chapel's eaves.

August, Edward

The month began with blood.

On the second day of August, Sir Thomas Grey of Heton was executed before a crowd in Southampton. Three days later, Richard of Cambridge and Lord Scrope of Masham met the same fate — beheaded by the king's order. The charge was treason. The penalty, death without delay.

The conspiracy had come to light swiftly and had been dealt with more swiftly still. It had been an ill-formed plot, half-whispered and barely tested, but dangerous all the same. Richard of Cambridge was Edward's nephew by blood. Lord Scrope, his friend of long standing. Yet Edward had shown no sign of protest. He had not intervened, nor pleaded for clemency. He had stood beside the king at council and nodded once when the sentence was read. That was all.

Whether he had known more than he said — or suspected more than he chose to speak — would never be recorded.

The executions delayed the sailing by scarcely a week. The army was too large, too disciplined, and too well supplied to be derailed by scandal. If anything, the swift justice confirmed what the men already believed: that this was a king who would not be crossed, and a campaign that would move without hesitation.

On the eleventh of August, the English fleet put to sea. Some two hundred vessels in total — cogs, transports, and warships — left the Solent and crossed under fair winds. They made landfall at Harfleur on the thirteenth. Edward of Norwich disembarked with the king's vanguard. The siege began within days.

Harfleur was well defended with massive stone walls and strong towers. A direct assault would be difficult and a quick end to a siege unlikely. The English brought siege engines and guns, but the town was surrounded by marshland and the River Lézarde, making it difficult to bring siege engines close. Flooding and muddy ground slowed attackers and offered additional protection to the defenders. As a strategic port, Harfleur's harbour itself was protected, including by chain booms or blockades that could be raised across the river to stop enemy ships from entering. Naval access was guarded as much as land access. Had Henry bitten off more than he could chew?

Disease began to stir among the ranks, the dreaded dysentery and other waterborne infections such as typhoid - known then as flux and fever would soon take their toll, decimating Henry's army as suredly as actual combat - but Henry refused to withdraw. The siege would hold and the death toll would mount.

Edward commanded men along the eastern trenches. He kept his tent modest, ate with his captains, and wrote letters to his stewards in England. He did not complain. He had seen worse.

The campaign, long prepared, was now underway. There could be no retreat, no second guessing. The die was cast. In the smoke and stench of the siege lines, Edward did what he had always done: he obeyed orders, kept to his duty, and rode where he was told.

And in the dark of the third week, when the wind turned inland and the sick began to die more quickly, he sat alone at the edge of his tent and watched the river.

September, Antoine

By September, the letters no longer arrived with discretion. They came openly, bearing the seals of dukes, counts, and marshals. The King of France, still absent in mind and body, had issued a general call to arms through his council. All princes of the blood were expected to ride. The English were entrenched at Harfleur, and the town was holding — but only just.

Antoine read each message, then passed it without comment to his secretary. He had not yet declared his intention, and still no formal order had been issued to Brabant. But the language of the requests had changed. Where July had been filled with suggestion, September was thick with expectation. They assumed his presence now — his name had been listed among the princes due to assemble in Rouen.

The stud farm was quiet. The air had turned cool, and the colts no longer kicked at the flies. One had gone lame, and the farrier, with Antoine's help, applied poultices of Comfrey, Wormwood and wine vinegar. Antoine supervised the bandaging himself. He stayed longer in the stables these days, preferring the steady rhythm of brushing, feeding, wrapping — acts that required no reply.

The ivy had reached the chapel roof. The slate tiles were starting to lift, warped by creeping roots and the persistent wet of late summer. The gardeners had stopped cutting it. Not from neglect — they had tried — but from some unspoken resignation. Each trimmed branch gave rise to two more. Antoine had it left alone.

Reports from Harfleur were grim. The English were suffering from disease — dysentery continued to ravage the ranks — but they still held the siege. The French relief force had been ordered to gather at Rouen. Banners from Bar, Alençon, and Vendôme had already begun to arrive. The Duke of Bourbon was expected by the end of the month. Antoine's absence was beginning to draw comment.

He took to writing in the evenings, not to answer his summons but to clarify his accounts. He left instructions for the council, should he be delayed. He drafted a list of stallions to remain under stud, and which mares to withhold from market. He left the orders in the care of his

Bailli; his wife, Jeanne de Harcourt, was barely sixteen and nowhere near experienced enough to run the estate. The Maître d'écurie would take care of all matters equine.

In Brussels, the merchant guilds debated neutrality in hushed tones. The roads remained open, but there was tension in the air, like a horse sensing thunder long before it sounds.

Still, Antoine said nothing. But he had begun sleeping in the tower room, the one that overlooked the lower paddocks. From there, he could see the ivy twisting along the ridgeline and feel the wood of the window frame beginning to shift beneath its weight.

He still had not decided. But the moment of decision was no longer his alone.

September, Edward

The siege of Harfleur ended on the twenty-second of September. Henry had encircled and isolated the town and bombarded the walls continuously. Each time a breach was made, the walls were repaired overnight. English sappers dug tunnels underground and fought hand to hand with their French equivalents in their counter-tunnels. Dysentery, hunger and hopelessness were taking their toll on the defenders and finally with no sign of a relief force, they sued for peace. The walls had held longer than expected, but dysentery had taken more from the English than French resistance. By the end, one in five was too weak to march. Henry's force was more than decimated. Had the defenders of Harfleur weakened Henry's forces enough?

Henry ordered the town to be garrisoned. Twelve hundred men were left behind to hold it, in the main those still alive but not yet fit to march.. The rest - those still able to ride or walk - were summoned to form the march. Edward was among the senior commanders consulted, though he offered no argument. The king had made up his mind.

The route to Calais would not be easy. The Somme lay between, and the French had already begun to move. Scouts reported enemy detachments along the fords. The main French host, gathering slowly at Rouen and along the Seine, was finally in motion. Edward marked it carefully on his campaign map — not out of fear, but out of habit.

He had buried men at Harfleur. Several of his household knights were dead, and his chaplain had died in the second week of the siege. He had led the prayers himself, briefly and without flourish. It was not the first time. He had fought in Wales, in Ireland, and across the marches. Men died. He had no illusions.

Still, something had shifted. The campaign had begun as a bold stroke — seize a port, march across the north, show strength before winter. But the siege had taken too long. Too many men were sick, the roads uncertain, the enemy finally stirred to action.

There was no talk of retreat, not aloud. But the choice to march to Calais was no longer a strategy. It was a necessity. Returning by sea would mean abandoning the horses and risking storms. Holding in Harfleur would look like weakness. Moving north was the only remaining gesture of control.

Edward made no protest. He attended the king's councils, marked the river crossings, and oversaw the ration lists. He did not speak in the strategy room unless asked, but when

asked, he answered plainly. The ford near Nesle was guarded. The ford at Béthencourt might not be. The roads were passable, but narrow. When the march began, he rode near the centre, flanked by his captains and squires. He had his sword repaired, his armour cleaned, and his personal standard re-stitched. The wind had torn it during the siege.

The fields of Normandy gave way to marshland, and the first true chills of autumn crept in. Each morning, the king rose early and rode the lines. Edward watched him. He had never seen Henry falter, not once. But even so, he knew how quickly campaigns turned. He had seen it before. After a hot summer, the storm clouds were brewing and rain was in the air.

October, Antoine

The first frost arrived early. It dusted the cobbles of the inner courtyard and etched the fence posts with fine silver just before dawn. The horses exhaled steam in the paddocks, and the ivy, untouched by cold, remained vivid and green. It had overtaken the chapel entirely by now. From the tower room, its shape had changed — no longer a plant but a presence.

By the second of October, Antoine had received formal notice: the French host was assembled and advancing north. The English had crossed the Somme. A battle was now expected. The Duke of Alençon had written again — less a plea, more a fraternal rebuke. Even Bar had sent word, though the two had not exchanged letters in years.

He still had not packed.

The haras continued in its rhythm, but the rhythm was not his. He walked the edge of the fields, where the forest pressed close. He went no further. Inside, his advisers grew uneasy. They had heard the same reports. A confrontation near the Artois plain was likely. This would not be another siege or skirmish. This would be a reckoning.

Antoine spoke of the herds, of fencing repairs, of estate accounts. He did not speak of France. But on the seventh of October, he summoned his stablemaster and asked for his war horse to be made ready. Just one. No train of baggage. No full retinue.

He gave no reason.

He had not brought his armour from Dijon. The ceremonial pieces were there — the embossed cuirass, the gilded helmet — but not the mail for war, not the jointed gauntlets, nor the hardened greaves. Those were stored in Burgundy, waiting for a summons that had not come. They were now too far away.

It had been deliberate, in a way he could not admit.

His sword was here — a practical blade, well-forged, unadorned. It had hung in the chapel for five years. He retrieved it himself on the ninth, without ceremony, and laid it across the table in the library. He cleaned it slowly, then set it in oil. The leather scabbard was cracked. It would serve.

He sent letters that day. Short ones. One to the city council of Brussels. One to Jeanne. One to his brother in Dijon. He asked for no men, no money, and no permission. He told no one of his plans.

On the thirteenth, a new colt was born - too early, too small. It died before sunrise. Antoine did not see it. He had left the main house before dawn and stood beneath the ivy-covered chapel eaves, hand resting on the lintel.

At midmorning, he dressed in travel clothes. Not ceremonial. Riding leathers, layered wool, the older cloak with the worn collar. His sword was belted low, and he wore only a light steel cap beneath his hood. The breastplate, when he finally sent for it, would catch up by cart - if the roads, becoming muddier by the day, allowed

He did not wait, just a goodbye to Faulx and by midday, he was gone.

The stable boys said nothing. One claimed the ivy had moved since the night before. Another said the chapel bell had rung, though no rope was drawn.

The courtyard remained still.

October, Edward

The march from Harfleur to Calais was never truly toward Calais, it was a feint.

After crossing the Somme near Béthencourt on the nineteenth of October, the English army changed direction, hugging the higher ground, seeking firmer paths. The roads were little more than trampled tracks now, soaked by the incessant, unseasonable autumn rain and chewed by cartwheels. Horses stumbled. Men slipped. Arrows warped in their bundles. Bread went sour.

Edward rode near the centre of the king's retinue, though no longer at its heart. Henry had grown more withdrawn. He rode early, spoke rarely, and spent long hours with his chaplains. The king's face had thinned; the disease at Harfleur had spared him, but despite medical care, he was not untouched, certainly physically and probably mentally. It was his birthright, his spiritual fire which enabled him to be unshaken in public and, in seeing this resoluteness, his army followed him to their fate..

By the twenty-first, scouts reported French cavalry in the woods ahead, just outside the rural village of Agincourt. That evening, campfires stretched for miles behind hedgerows and fallow fields. Rations were tightened again. Some companies had marched for three days on little more than soaked oats and river water.

Edward did not complain. His boots were cracked. His horse had lost weight. His armour bore fresh rust. At night, he sat with his captains and checked the rolls. He asked after the sick. He reviewed the order of battle, though it had scarcely changed since Harfleur. Archers on the flanks. Men-at-arms at the centre. Ground stakes. Narrow frontage. Let the French come.

The feast day of the twin brothers Crispin and Chrispinian was soon approaching, October 25th, Agincourt. The English archers prayed to St. Crispin, the patron saint of cobblers, tanners and leather workers. Leather was of paramount importance to them, boots, quivers, bow grips, wrist guards, and string tabs were all fashioned from it. They viewed him as their protector and beseeched his intervention to help them prevail. Had Henry gotten lucky?

On the twenty-third, the French were finally seen in force. Their banners rose beyond the wood at Maisoncelles, just outside Agincourt which offered little of defensive value. Not that the French nobility had any intention of defending, they held the higher ground and the enemy was downhill. Just right for a charge. More were still arriving. Nobles, knights, mounted companies — larger than the English by far.

There would be no avoiding them now.

The army encamped in mud. The English line was hemmed by woods on both flanks — a thin field of clay and furrow between them. Rain fell again that night. The men dug small drains around their tents. Archers huddled under wagon cloths. There were few songs, fewer fires.

Edward did not sleep long. He had his armour checked before dawn on the twenty-fourth, piece by piece. The straps at his left elbow had stretched. He would ride regardless. He kept a small devotional text in his saddlebag, but did not open it. He walked the line with Henry once in silence. Then again alone.

The French still had not attacked. They waited, confident in their number. That suited the king.

On the evening of the twenty-fourth, Edward stood outside his tent and looked east. He saw the mist along the ground, the broken stubble of the field, the heavy branches bending under wet. He smelled turned earth and woodsmoke, distant and thin.

He said nothing. He did not write.

The battle would be fought tomorrow.

25th October 1415 Convergence.

The fog rose late. The sun, when it came, was weak and wet-edged, resting low behind the tangle of bare trees. Crows moved slowly, as if weighed down by the mist. The field, a narrow stubble-cut valley between the woods, would not dry before dusk.

The French host had been assembling for days. Antoine of Brabant arrived in the final hours of the night, unheralded and under-prepared. He rode at the edge of the vanguard, sword belted to his side, a half-armoured breastplate borrowed from a knight of Maine, and no device on his cloak. He had not slept. The mud had soaked through his boots by morning.

He had not been included in the battle orders. The Marshal of France did not recognise him at first. When he named himself, the reply was cautious:

"His Grace of Burgundy sends no word. Your name is not on the list."
Antoine simply nodded.
“Then I will ride as a free man, where I am needed.”

No one stopped him.

Edward, Duke of York, stood beside the king when the first French charge broke against the English line. The archers fired volleys of arrows, over six per minute. The ground churned to paste. When the melee reached the centre, it became difficult to see anything at all — just splinters of steel and cloth, mud-caked bodies falling, men trampled, banners caught on tree branches.

By midday, the air stank of iron and sweat. Prisoners began to stagger back to the English rear — some with hands raised, others already wounded. Among them, a figure, unsteady but upright and proud, his cloak torn to the waist, face streaked with blood and soil, an arrow protruding from his right shoulder

One of Edward's captains halted him with a sword-tip. The man spoke French. Low Burgundian French.

"I am Antoine de Brabant. I yield."

The captain frowned. There was no crest. No visible rank. No squire to announce him. The man's accent was noble, but his condition was not.

He was brought to the rear with the others and held under guard in a makeshift enclosure formed by upturned carts and the remnants of a hedge. The guards were young, harried, uncertain. No one had time for protocol.

Then came the panic. A second French force had been seen forming in the woods. Arrows ran low. Whispers spread. Henry gave the order: kill the prisoners. Not from cruelty — from calculation. There were not enough men to guard them if the French attacked again.

Edward heard the order spoken aloud. He did not question it. He turned from the field and walked to the prisoner line to oversee its execution. A necessary thing. Swift.

But as he approached, he saw a man rise from the ground, hands still bound, his cloak now nearly black with wet. There was something in the posture — the length of limb, the angle of the jaw — that caught at Edward's memory.

Paris. Twenty years earlier. A banquet at the Hôtel Saint-Pol. Glass windows glinting. Candles reflected in the wine. A Valois prince seated three places to Edward's left. Older, broader, already weighty with lands and command. Laughing in a low voice, speaking with the Duchess of Bar. A quiet nod shared when their eyes met across the trenchers of roast venison.

Not friends. But equals. Recognised.

Now, the same man stood ankle-deep in mud, unarmed, unnamed, and mistaken for a lesser soul.

Edward stepped forward.

"Wait—"

But the blow had already fallen.

A young English squire, following the order as given, struck Antoine down from behind — quick, efficient, impersonal. He fell without sound. His body collapsed onto the greyed stems of last season's wheat.

Edward stood still. His hands were open. There was nothing more to do other than to rally to his King, near the centre of the English line. Henry fought without consideration to himself and Edward fell defending him, the highest ranking Englishman to do so on that day.

Epilogue

In the seasons that followed, the ivy did not retreat.

By spring, it had smothered the chapel roof entirely. Its roots split the stone of the eastern barn, and the bell tower listed at an angle. The grooms refused to stable horses nearby. The dogs avoided it. The gardeners, once so diligent, no longer spoke of cutting it back. When asked, they only said it would not be worth the trouble.

They remembered how it had risen in that final summer — not with grace, but with intent. It had moved with purpose, claimed walls, windows, doorways. Antoine had watched it. Never stopped it. The stable boys said it had thickened overnight before his departure. One claimed the vine had twined around the chapel bell rope, though no one had pulled it.

It was a living omen, and it had been misread. Not merely an invasion of the stones, but a foretelling: that what was entwined would not be undone. That what was delayed could no longer be deferred. That from the house of Antoine de Brabant, no line would thrive.

After Agincourt, Antoine was buried nameless among the dead. No monument was raised. His brother in Dijon sent no mourning order. The French court barely acknowledged him. His children — Jean, Philip, and Marie — did not endure. Jean died within a year. Philip vanished before his majority. Marie married beneath her station and bore no heir. Jeanne, his young wife, seems to disappear from history altogether, no record remaining of remarriage. Within a single generation, the house of Antoine was extinguished, its name absorbed into others, the Ivy dread foresight had come to pass.

The haras passed from hand to hand but eventually proved unmanageable . The chapel collapsed. The ivy grew thicker. It climbed the gate posts and walls and then even the paddock stones were covered and, over time, disappeared under the falling Beech leaves and sank from view.

Today

It is still possible to see traces of the boundary of the stud farm in the Forest, but you need to know where to look. The signs are there but the Ivy, having foretold of fate, has gone. Only his spirit remains, patrolling the Forêt de Soignes on Faulx, looking for wolves and with his ghostly meute, riding out to hunt deer, boar and bird.