

René Jean-Paul Dewil

The City of Ghent 1337-1345

Ghent in the fourteenth century

The Captain

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The Characters

The Vresele family

Juris Vresele	(1260-1325)	
Mergriet Mutaert	(1265-1340):	wife of Juris Vresele.
Gerolf Vresele	(1285-1349):	son of Juris, monk.
Gillis Vresele	(1293-1360):	son of Juris.
Avezoete Wulslager	(1295-1349):	wife of Gillis Vresele.
Agneete Vresele	(1300-1335):	daughter of Juris, married 1320 to James van Artevelde.
Heinric Vresele	(1325-1390):	son of Gillis, clerk.
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
Jehan Terhagen	(1319-1390):	adopted son of Gillis Vresele

The de Smet family

Wouter de Smet	(1280-1348):	smith.
Lijsbetten Mutaert	(1283-1349):	wife of Wouter de Smet, cousin of Mergriet Mutaert
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 1330.
Heyla de Smet	(1330-1385):	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.

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.

Agte Homberg (1344-1390): wife of Boudin van Lake, married 1362.

The Denout family

John Denout (1283-1349): fuller.
 Selie Scivaels (1284-1349): wife of John Denout.
 Pieter Denout (1303-1365): fuller, son of John.
 Kerstin de Hert (1309-1370): wife of Pieter Denout, married 1331.
 Martin Denout (1330-1382): fuller, son of Pieter, married to Avezoete van Lake 1351.
 Wivine Denout (1331-1391): daughter of Pieter Denout, twin of Quintine.
 Quintine Denout (1331-1365): daughter of Pieter Denout, twin of Wivine.

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
 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

The Artevelde Family

William van Artevelde the Elder:	broker of Ghent
William van Artevelde the Younger:	son of William the Elder
William van Artevelde the Youngest:	son of William the Younger, married to Zwane van Mirabello
Zwane van Mirabello:	daughter of Simon de Mirabello-Van Halen married to William the Youngest van Artevelde
Francis van Artevelde :	son of William I, Castellan of Beveren
Marie (I) van Artevelde:	possible daughter of William the Elder
John (I) van Artevelde:	son of William the Elder
John (II) van Artevelde:	possible son of John (I), a priest
Unknown son:	son of William the Elder, murdered at Mons
James van Artevelde (1295-1345):	son of William the Elder, captain of Ghent married first to ? (Agneete Vresele) married second to Catherine de Coster
Catherine de Coster (1314-1388):	second wife of James
Zeger de Bornaige :	second husband of Catherine de Coster (24 June 1349)
John de Coster:	brother of Catherine de Coster
(Agneete Vresele) (1300-1335):	first wife of James van Artevelde
Unknown daughter:	daughter from the first marriage of James married to Godfrey de Roede
Godfrey de Roede:	husband of the unknown daughter of James van Artevelde
Wivine de Roede:	daughter of Godfrey de Roede and the unknown daughter of the first marriage of James, married to Matthew de Backere
Matthew de Backere:	husband of Wivine de Roede
Margaret van Artevelde (ca. 1320-?):	daughter from the first marriage of James, married 18 October 1341 to Walter Lord of Erpe
Walter Lord of Erpe:	married to Margaret van Artevelde in 1341
Martin van Erpe:	son of Walter Lord of Erpe with Margaret
John van Artevelde (?-1365):	son from the first marriage of James, married first to Christine Lady of Drongen, married second to Catherine van Namen
Christine van Steenland, Lady of Drongen (?-1357):	first wife of John van Artevelde
Catherine van Namen :	second wife of John van Artevelde
Catherine van Artevelde (ca. 1345-?):	daughter of John's first marriage married to Ser Daniel van Haelwijn
Ser Daniel van Haelwijn:	husband of Catherine van Artevelde, daughter of John
Daniel II van Haelwijn:	son of Ser Daniel van Haelwijn
John van Haelwijn:	son of Ser Daniel van Haelwijn
James van Artevelde the Younger (?-1370):	probable son from the first marriage of James van Artevelde, also called Coppin
Philip van Artevelde (18 July 1340-1382):	son from the second marriage of James van Artevelde married to Yolante van den Broucke

Yolante van den Broucke (?-1433):	wife of Philip van Artevelde
Catherine (II) van Artevelde (1341-1382):	daughter from the second marriage of James van Artevelde, married to John de Scoteleere
John de Scoteleere (?-1382):	husband of Catherine (II) van Artevelde
Linus de Scoteleere:	son of John de Scoteleere
John II de Scoteleere:	son of John de Scoteleere

A separate branch:

John van Artevelde:	married to Livine de Groote
Livine de Groote:	married to this John van Artevelde
Marie (II) van Artevelde:	daughter of this John van Artevelde possibly married to Ser Gelnoot Damman

The feudal Lords

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

Kings of England:

Edward I Longshanks (1272–1307), married (1) to Eleanor of Castille and (2) Margaret of France.

Edward II of Caernarfon (1307 – 1327), married to Isabel of France.

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

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

Kings of France:

Philip IV the Fair – Philippe le Bel (1285-1314), married to Joan I of Navarre

Louis X the Quarreler – Louis le Hutin (1314-1316) married to (1) Margaret of Burgundy and (2) Clementia of Hungary.

John I the Posthumous – Jean I le Posthume (November 1316)

Philip V the Tall – Philippe I le Long (1316-1322), brother of Louis X, married to Joan II countess of Burgundy.

Charles IV the Fair – Charles IV le Bel (1322-1328), brother of Philip V, married to (1) Blanche of Burgundy, (2) to Marie of Luxemburg and (3) to Jeanne d'Evreux.

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:

Guy I of Dampierre – Gwijde van Dampierre (1251-1305), married to Mathilda of Béthune.

Robert III Lion of Flanders – Robrecht III Leeuw van Vlaanderen (1305-1322), married to (1) Blanche of Sicily and (2) Yolande II countess of Nevers.

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.

Regents of Flanders at various periods:

William of Gulik (b. 1275-1304): grandson of Guy I of Dampierre from his mother's side, leader of the Flemish armies at the Battle of the Golden Spurs (1302), son of the family of Jülich (German) or Juliers (French).

John of Namur (1297-1330): count of Namur, son of Guy I of Dampierre

Robert of Cassel: second son of Robert III count of Flanders. When Robert's first son, Louis of Nevers died, the succession to the county of Flanders passed on by French support to Louis's son, equally named Louis, who became Louis I of Nevers and count of Flanders.

Popes

Boniface VIII (1294-1303) - Benedetto Caetani
 Benedict XI (1303-1304) - Niccolò Boccasini
 Clement V (1304-1314): first pope at Avignon - Bertrand de Got
 John XXII (1316-1334): at Avignon - Jacques d'Euse
 Nicolaas V (1328-1330): counter-pope for Avignon - Pietro Rainalducci
 Benedict XII (1334-1342): at Avignon - Jacques Fournier
 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 de Genève

Kings of Germany and Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire:

Albert I – Albrecht von Habsburg (1298-1308): married to Elizabeth of Carinthia.
 Henry VII – Heinrich VII der Luxemburger (1308-1313): Holy Roman Emperor, married to Margaret of Brabant.
 Louis 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 II (1294–1312): married to Margaret Plantagenet, princess of England.
 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

John II of Hainault (1257-1304): married to Philippine of Luxemburg
 William III of Hainault (1304-1337): married to Joanna of Valois
 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 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 I of Guelders and Wassenberg – Reinoud I van Guelders (1271–1318): married (1) to Irmgard of Limburg and (2) to Margaret of Flanders.

Reginald II the Black of Wassenberg – Reinoud de Zwarte (1318–1343): Guelders was elevated to a Duchy during his reign. Married to (1) Sophia Berthout, Lady of Mechelen and (2) to Eleanor of Woodstock, daughter of King Edward II of England.

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.

Chapter 1. Ghent's Destiny. December 1337 – Spring 1338

The Chronicler

Kings and princes and dukes have chroniclers in their service to note their feats on parchment and so record their glorious deeds for posterity. Towns have no such chroniclers. Therefore, I, Jehan Terhagen, will tell of the events that happened in our good city of Ghent in the remarkable years from 1337 to 1345. I am the lord of Ter Hage. My name should be thus pronounced and written, but I accept gladly the name by which my mentor and adopted father, Gillis Vresele, made me known in Ghent.

During the peasant revolts in Flanders of the terrible years of from 1325 to 1329, my parents were ignominiously murdered and our manor destroyed by angry farmers of the countryside of Axel. I remember my father and mother as gentle people who were more interested in books and travels than in maltreating their journeymen, but in those years the peasants thanked them with horror, burning my estates and killing my family.

Our large farm complex was not protected by strong local forces of guards, and my parents never employed men-at-arms. It consisted of several barns and byres, strung together by a high stone wall in which stood a fine, large gate that was never closed except at nights. A stone manor in which we lived had been built at the end, dominating the yard. My mother was French-born, so my real name should have been Jean, but the name Gillis Vresele understood when I whispered it to him was Jehan, and so it remained. Our farm and manor stood near Axel, south of the western bend in the estuary of the Scheldt in northern Flanders, and I remember keenly the quiet, happy life of my youth.

When our farm was being attacked by the peasants, most of whom came from far and certainly not from the environs of our domain, my father told me to escape by a small tunnel through which only children could flee. I had explored the tunnel before, having discovered it a few years before. I crept through the dark, low ceilinged corridor, hearing the screams of my mother and the shouts of hatred of the attackers in the courtyard. I emerged near a brook and ran to a range of willow trees that stood beside a small river, on the left side of the road to Axel. I smelled the stench of burning straw, of burning thatch, and then of burning human flesh. Thick columns of smoke rose from where our buildings stood. The fools also of course burned part of our livestock with the barns. I heard the animals of which I knew the names and the characters scream in agony!

Then, a man on horseback passed, and he heard my sobs, took me, and brought me to the convent near Axel. The nuns were friendly, but Gillis Vresele did not allow me to rot in an orphanage, so he took me with him to Ghent and raised me in his family. It was the best opportunity I received from God after He had torn my parents away from me, for the family of Gillis has since that day always considered me a child of the house. They chastised me as they chastised their own children, and loved me as their own. I have not lacked in affection and in respect.

Gillis Vresele is not a knight, but a simple *poorter*, a citizen of Ghent and a broker or trader, a wealthy trader, and originally, long ago, probably the son of a weavers' family. I believe he is one of the wealthiest men of Ghent, though he hides his status in humility.

Gillis Vresele did not let my manor fall entirely into ruins. It took him many years, while I grew up, but he repaired the walls, placed new roofs on the buildings, and hired stewards to make of the farm once more a profitable estate. We, the ter Hages, owned much land, and the property claims were found in the convent near our domain. Gillis exploited the peat bogs, built a few dikes where necessary, and turned fertile lands into vast corn fields. With the pastures, on which he placed cows and other cattle, the domain became very profitable. When I was sixteen years old, Gillis took me for the first time back to ter Hage, and showed me proudly what he had made of my heritage. Only the two of us rode to Axel that day. Gillis told me the farm was mine. He also explained in many arguments I could understand that I was too young to take possession of the domain and be its master.

‘Learn, learn, learn, boy,’ Gillis pushed on me, ‘and when you’re ready, you can tell me, and come to live here and manage the estate. The money the lands and the farm make are being held for you by the abbess of the convent. I control the accounts. The abbess is an honest woman, a hard woman, but fair. The money is being kept for you in various places, but there is not much money in coins, for I used most of it to make more for you. The income is placed in custody with men in Bruges. I will show you where the papers are, in a special chest in my house on the *Kalanderberg* of Ghent. Your money is invested in shiploads, in houses of Ghent and Bruges, in vineyards and in businesses of our town. When you come here, you will be relatively wealthy, very well-to-do with the invested funds, and you can live off the domain.’

I was astonished and grateful. I had thought my domain had vanished. When I was ready, the ter Hages would rise again! There would be a new ter Hage family, a woman and children, and the lands would prosper once more. At that time, though, I felt I was not ready to bury myself in the countryside. Ghent was so much more exciting! Gillis smiled knowingly when I told him.

Then, he told me about his friends of the Pharaïldis group.

The Pharaïldis men were more than a group of partners and friends, all wealthy *poorters* and business partners in Ghent. They were members of influential families of which the sons were intimate friends of each other, and these sons married sisters of their friends. Multiple blood relations ran in their families. They were also linked with other well-known families of the city. They were the Vreseles, traders, the van Lakes, weavers, the Denouts, fullers, the de Herts, shippers, the de Smets, goldsmiths and the van Artevelde, also traders. The leaders of these families met and discussed about business, about the affairs of the town, and about the political situation of Flanders. When they felt by the end of the year of 1337 that Ghent was rapidly dwindling, starving and losing its wealth, the fame and happiness of the city being quenched like the flame of a candle into greasy black smoke, they decided drastic action was needed to turn the destiny of Ghent in their favour.

They did not act rashly. They were logical and cautious men. They sent to the foreground the man among them who seemed the most capable for leading the people of Ghent out of an impending catastrophe.

That man was James van Artevelde.

I witnessed what I am about to tell you, and I took frequent notes of what I heard in a diary, so the following story is true. I felt that when the Pharaïldis men decided together to act on the injustice done to Flanders and to Ghent, something really important was in the making, something that could change how we considered our way of living in our territories for centuries to come.

The Plot

On Christmas Eve of 1337, very late in the evening, after the last holy mass celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ in the churches of the city of Ghent, several men hurried, hidden in closed brown cloaks and wide dark hoods to a large house on the *Kalanderberg*, a street of cloth traders, wealthy weavers and landowners, hostellers and brewers. The men who walked cautiously and hurriedly, were among the wealthiest and most prominent men of Ghent. The house they sought was a complex of several buildings and barns belonging to the van Artevelde family. When the men knocked on the door, they were welcomed by Catherine de Coster, James van Artevelde's elegant wife.

Catherine was a member of a very respectable family of the town, her father having been a sexton of the abbey of Sint Peter, a landowner and knight.

The men did not arrive alone. They came in pairs, in threes, in small groups.

Catherine de Coster first welcomed William van Vaernewijc and William van Huse, young men who belonged to the most ancient, noble and well-to-do *poorter* families of Ghent. She kept the door open, for Pieter van den Hove and Gelnoot van Lens entered. Catherine had a special warm word for Gillis Vresele and Raes van Lake, who arrived a little later. Gillis was a trader, like her husband, Raes a wealthy weaver. Behind them hurried in John Denout, a fuller, whose family was related to the man with whom he was engaged in vivid conversation, the shipper Arnout de Hert. The goldsmith Wouter de Smet came in as last. Wouter dealt in gold and had connections with the moneychangers of Ghent.

These men were all formidable personalities. They had reached their prime age of life, they laughed, confirming this of themselves over a few cups of wine. Their families were in one or other way related. Strong bonds of friendship and mutual support ran among them. They were linked by emotional and by business ties. Many of their most daring ventures had been sealed together and had needed their concerted cooperation. They were connected to other families of Ghent, families that counted members among the aldermen and knights who governed the city. The Vreseles, de Smets, van Lakes, Denouts and de Herts had formed with James van Artevelde an association they secretly called the Pharaïldis group, which had been founded after a covert expedition to a certain abbey of Zele, which had proved to become the basis of their current wealth. The men never referred to anymore to that expedition, which apparently had been the basis of their fortune, but it remained in their minds and linked them.

These men met in conference at Christmas Eve because the situation in Ghent had become catastrophic. Ghent depended on the wool and cloth industry for three fourths of its richness, and the import of English wool to Flanders had been stopped by King Edward III of England, in retaliation to the count of Flanders having arrested treacherously English merchants in his county. The count had imprisoned the English traders right after a conversation in Paris with the king of France, so the notables of Ghent surmised the King had ordered his loyal vassal to proceed this way. The kings of England and of France disputed the crown of France.

King Edward III of England had only made claim to the throne of France after the king of France, his kinsman Philip VI of Valois, had threatened to take away from him the regions of Guyenne and Gascony, lands Edward held by heritage in feudal loan from the kings of France. Guyenne and Gascony were important for Edward, for the income from these regions amounted to about as high as the income from his English territories. Edward's claims on the French throne were justified, for in family ties Edward stood closer to the deceased, previous French king, than Philip of Valois who had been designated to the crown by the nobility of France as the successor. Edward, however, was a son in the female line of succession, a line refused by Philip and by the French noblemen.

Without English quality wool in Flanders there could be no cloth, no fulling, no dyeing, no transport of cloth, no trade, no wealth.

The funds of the wealthiest families of Ghent were dwindling. The poorer *poorters* of Ghent were starving. Beggars slept in recesses of every street. People too proud to beg died in their houses or along the quays of the Leie and of the Scheldt, the two rivers to which Ghent owed part of its prosperity. For fifteen months, not one bale of quality English wool reached Ghent, whereas the weavers of the nearby duchy of Brabant received all the wool they needed from the staple of Dordrecht. There was even increasing talk that the staple of Dordrecht would be moved to Antwerp.

The poor and the craftsmen of Ghent suffered most. At this end of 1337, the traders of Ghent had sunk to their knees. Their fortunes vanished. Soon, the richest families would lose their wealth!

The only alternative to many seemed to assemble their last funds and to flee from Ghent and Flanders, from a dead city and a doomed county. This, they refused envisaging, for they loved their city. The forefathers of these *Gentenaars* had found refuge within the strong walls of Ghent. Many of them originated from other places than Ghent, but all of them had grown roots since several generations in the town, some had founded the centre at the confluence of the Leie and the Scheldt, and all had found safety and wealth here.

When the grave men now sat around the large oak table in the main hall of the van Artevelde, James spoke as first.

‘I have asked all of you to meet this fine evening of Christmas, a night of peace and hope in the commemoration of the birth of our Saviour, because I am desperate, and I believe you are as much wretched as I am. I have seen men and women die in our streets. Hungry children huddle under our wooden bridges. Fine families break up because the master of the house cannot find work and his last coins have vanished. Compared to last year, only half of the number of boats sails on our rivers. Our staples are empty. We have no money to pay for grain. I see only desolation around me, and each day the best people leave Ghent with their families, many on foot, pushing the meagre rests of their belongings on chariots. They seek bread in Brabant, in Hainault, in France, and even in England. The king of England promised shelter, coins and women to the weavers and fullers who leave Ghent for his kingdom. Our secrets of production and our know-how will soon be copied in other regions. The weavers of Brabant, of Leuven and Brussels, work like madmen and win the cloth markets which we once dominated. The Lombards we traded with leave our county. You know all that!’

James paused, drank, let his words sink in, and then he continued.

‘Our count and king have caused this dire situation. Not once have they given the least thought to what might happen to us. Ghent is but one town in their vast territories, and Ghent had always remained so very loyal as to die for them. Dying, starving, failing is what Ghent is doing indeed. Our aldermen, as well as our noblemen, have their hands tied in loyalty to the count and the king, so nothing is done to bring back our crafts and our income. *Vrijheid en Nering*, freedom and income, was our slogan. We worked hard to live. Today, it seems our income has vanished and we have no more coins in the city treasure to organise the defence for our town. Our freedoms will exceedingly be trampled on. Ghent is at the verge of becoming a feeble, dead city. Are we going to stand by and let this happen?’

The men cried of ‘no, no!’ They slammed their fists on the table.

James van Artevelde had only summed up the state of the city. Catherine de Coster may have been listening behind the door, for the van Artevelde women surreptitiously entered the hall

with hot, spiced wine and Christmas cakes. Catherine stepped in first with a large platter of cakes. The wives of the de Vreseles and the de Smets, the van Lakes and the de Herts followed. How had Catherine warned the women? How had they arrived without being seen by the men? In any case, here they were, smiling and serving everybody in a few moments. Then, they left the men to their business. The statement the women made was clear: you may be discussing grave decisions, we are standing behind the doors! Beware of what you will say! The men smiled.

James van Artevelde drank, waited while the men gave him all their attention again, and then he said, 'the aldermen have their hands tied and cannot act against the count. Other men must act and show a new way, a new policy. We have discussed this a few times already, in bribes and pieces, but never like tonight, all together. Some of us have concocted a proposal to force us out of the quandary we are in. Gillis, please explain!'

Gillis Vresele stood from his chair.

'Fine! In fact, I should not really explain again what we have come up with, for we have already discussed our proposal, though not everybody knows how we have amended and changed the final proposal. This is the last time we'll have an overview of what we should do. As from this night, what I will reveal must be our final plan. You had better have your last say, and then either stick to the plan, or tell us plainly you will have no part in it. After tonight, the dice will be thrown!'

Gillis looked around, saw only bowed heads and heads looking at him with stern eyes. He detected no opposition in the faces of the men, some scepticism perhaps, but no denial. He continued.

'We are going to take over power of government in Ghent. There should be no doubt about this. We need a few men who will have to wield all power of leadership in Ghent. That is a very dangerous thing to do, for power can be misused and it can be challenged. We want no form of ancient dictatorship in our town, but if the aldermen cannot decide on a new policy, then someone else will have to. Here is what we shall do.

We cannot disavow the count's rights to the county, nor can we secede from the God-granted rights of the kings of France over our lands. We cannot deliberately cut those links, for we would have all the nobles of Flanders, the count and the king straight against us, in the same way as the peasant rebels of Zannekin did and lost their heads. We do not want a battle such as that of Cassel of ten years ago, even if we would have more chances on our side to win than Nicholas Zannekin had. Vital is that the cities of Flanders join our cause, so we will have to send delegates of Ghent to these towns to explain what we propose, and do what is necessary to have them adopt our scheme. Our situation in Flanders is so bad I doubt we will receive negative answers from the other cities.

We also hold dearly on to our institutions and our freedoms. We cannot do away with the rights of the count and the king, for then everything crumbles too drastically, too soon, too totally. Our freedom charters, our rules lose all jurisdictional foundation, all lawful justification if we renege on count and king. Too many people in Flanders and abroad will dislike such refusal. We must risk these a little, but we can sail between the winds, as our friend Arnout would say. We hold on to our thirteen aldermen of the Law and to our thirteen aldermen of the Estate, to our twenty-six aldermen as they have been elected last August. We do not change the names. The aldermen shall continue as before to manage the town's affairs. What we do change, and I hope even that only temporarily, is that we are going to appoint five captains of the town, one from each parish. The captains will not only be our military leaders, as has happened in the past, but they will actually lead the city, hold the *Beleed der*

Stede, the supreme government of the town. In other words, for all important matters concerning the future of our town, the aldermen will do as the captains tell them. We have already discreetly proposed such an organisation to most of the aldermen, to the ones we considered honest people who wanted a new turn in the government. They seem sufficiently desperate to agree with us. The aldermen take a step back and will let the captains decide over the most urgent matters that are vital for the survival of the city. They shall vote for what must be done and lend their lawfulness to the decisions. This way, we do not need to change our institutions.

We may have to face opposition from certain men, from men so loyal to the count and the king that they stubbornly refuse any change. The military leaders will therefore immediately receive a personal guard of about twenty *knapen*, young men ready to die for our cause. The militia of Ghent, the White Hoods, and the *Ribauden*, the militia who guard the town's siege engines at the *Waalpoort*, shall be placed under the command of the captains of the parishes. One of our captains shall be called the captain-in-chief, with the same prerogatives as the other captains. The captain-in-chief will be the supreme military commander of the town. We believe that position should be handed over to James van Artevelde, who has accepted to take up that role.'

Gillis paused, drank, and paused. Nobody in the hall interrupted him. The men nodded and remained silent. The moment was grave.

'As to our policy, we have one major aim to pursue. We want English wool! We shall have to declare us disobedient to the count and the king on this one, sole point. We must declare Ghent and Flanders neutral in the conflict between England and France. We must have neutrality in the war between the two kings in order to convince the king of England to be friends with us and to allow us unrestricted access to English wool. We must have neutrality for the English merchants to trade without hinder in Flanders. I repeat: not only in Ghent, but in the whole of Flanders. It is therefore crucial our views be accepted by the other Flemish cities. We must also later send delegations of Flanders to Paris and to London to explain our desperate move.

We believe both kings will be reluctant to lose Flanders entirely. If necessary, we defend our neutrality with arms, but we fight only inside our own county. We may tolerate English or French armies in our lands, but only if they come in peace with us and pay for what they take. We shall not substantially support one or other king.'

'How will the captains be appointed?' William van Vaerneuwijc wondered.

'The captains will be chosen by the people,' James van Artevelde answered coolly. 'I will propose the names and hope the people will agree.'

'I have finished,' Gillis Vresele said rapidly. 'Many details will still have to be filled in, but the captains will have to act on many points in the spur of the moment. Solutions will have to be found as the issues come. We shall have to force changes among the city clerks, for example, for some of them are corrupt. We must put a rapid end to corruption and extortion. The situation is much too desperate.'

'We have our five captains,' James van Artevelde interjected, grinning. 'We only have to make sure they get chosen. Their names may be accepted by acclamation of the people. The aldermen will not refuse the names.'

The men smiled knowingly and relaxed. They understood a little cynicism, a trick played on possible opponents, though nobody expected somebody to oppose the choice.

'The captains will have to be reasonable men,' William van Vaerneuwijc said. 'We want no Julius Caesar among them!'

‘How long will the captains hold power over the city?’ Gelnoot van Lens asked.

‘As long as necessary,’ James van Artevelde replied. ‘I do not intend to be a Julius Caesar. I have not even wanted to be an alderman in the past. The captains can hold on to power as long as that power is tolerated. The leading men of Ghent, we, the aldermen, the poorters, will know when they can and must put a stop to the leadership of the captains. I suppose Ghent will revert from a government by captains back to a government of the two bodies of aldermen in full power, when Flanders and our own wealth are secured.’

‘In other words, no Julius Caesar but a Cincinnatus returning to his plough,’ William van Huse muttered.

‘Exactly,’ James van Artevelde told, thereby showing he was one of the few men in the hall who had heard of Cincinnatus.

The other men kept their silence.

‘The issue with this plan is,’ van Huse remarked, ‘that the people of Ghent must force the change in power to happen. Otherwise, we will just be a few men making a stab for power but lacking any legitimacy. Our actions will falter!’

‘Right again,’ James van Artevelde agreed. ‘Raes van Lake has something to say on that subject.’

James sat in his chair again and Raes van Lake stood. He looked at the men who sat around the table.

‘We have done the best we could,’ Raes asserted. ‘We have been telling to as many people possible that a solution to our problems with the import of wool truly did exist, and that James van Artevelde had that solution. The town hums with rumours. That is one of the reasons we should now act rapidly, for the rumours will also reach the men who refuse all change of policy and government. There remain still people, powerful people, in Ghent, who stay so loyal to the count and the king that they will refuse any measure that has not been proposed by the lords, even though they propose nothing at all! We must also fear envious men and families that have always proven antagonistic to us. Nevertheless, the populace of Ghent is desperate. They will accept anything as long as it promises to bring back wool. Some of us have proposed for James van Artevelde to call the people to assemble in mass somewhere, all the interested people, many thousands preferably, and explain to the people what can be done. In other words, we should force a kind of general insurrection of the people of Ghent, and then use that movement to direct it to accept our plan and our measures. We want the insurrection to be peaceful, of course, and sufficiently large to force the last sceptic aldermen to accept the dominance of the captains. The captains shall then be installed by the assembled people and by the aldermen. We believe we cannot demand for more legitimacy! It shall be hard for the count to counter-act on an organisation decided upon and supported by the legally elected aldermen of the city and by the people.’

Raes van Lake sat again and groped for his cup.

‘When and where shall this assembly of the people take place?’ William van Huse wanted to know.

‘The time must be soon, next week at the latest,’ James van Artevelde replied. ‘The place shall be the *Bijloke* Field. That field is the only one large enough, outside the *kuipe* and yet near the centre of Ghent. We have built a platform of wood there from which I could address the crowd.’

‘The *Bijloke* shall be our Pnyx,’ William van Huse remarked.

‘Exactly,’ James van Artevelde repeated, smiling. ‘We shall call the people to the Pnyx like the ancient Athenians called together their *ecclesia*.’

Once more, William van Huse was astonished by James’s erudition.

‘Well then,’ William van Vaernewijc concluded, ‘it seems all has been arranged. I suggest we continue spreading the good work. The trick will be to manage the wrath of the people toward something positive, to our purpose. It is a dangerous path we are threading on, we risk our heads! I’m convinced it is also the only possible way to save Ghent and Flanders. Let us drink to that! You presented us with your best wine, James!’

The men heaved their cups and drank. They continued to discuss the plan until early in the morning.

When the conspirators had returned home, only Gillis Vresele and Raes van Lake remained in the hall with James van Artevelde.

‘James,’ Gillis began, ‘of all the men present this night, you shall the most stick out your neck. We know how the story starts, we do not know how and where it all ends. You realise, I’m sure, that the aldermen, in taking a step back, wash their hands in innocence and yet stay in office. They will watch what happens with astonishment and amusement, let you do whatever you like to do, and when you falter they will step once more in front as if nothing had happened to their functions. They will claim they did not know anything of what we have prepared, had no part in it, and they will take away your leadership position, imprison you for treason, or even kill you. If the problem gets solved and we receive our wool, when the kings have sorted out their dispute, the aldermen will take a step forward, stride out of the shadows, and either give you a nice tap on the shoulder and a little thanks but not too loudly, or push you violently aside. The old landowner families have the power of their fortunes and they have too many interests in common to hand you power on a platter for eternity. At one point or other they will cause your downfall and they will want back their lost power. Also, you may have the people with you, tomorrow and the following months, but a crowd is fickle! Today the good people of Ghent may adore you, they will shout and cheer if you succeed in getting us wool, but two weeks later they will listen to envious men who spread all kinds of nasty rumours about you. The people are envious of too much success, James, of too much glory! You must appeal to the guilds for support, but the guilds dislike each other. The three deans want power for themselves, each individually. The dean of the weavers doesn’t like the dean of the fullers, for the dean of the fullers is always asking for more money from the weavers. The overdean of the small guilds distrusts the two other deans. Keeping all the men who wield some power today happy and quiet, and have them hand over some of their power to you for a long stretch of time, will be tricky. You cannot base your own power on any so-called God-granted legitimacy, or traditions-based legitimacy. So you have before you a balancing act that may need Herculean force and the greatest wisdom. You realise that, don’t you?’

‘Of course I do,’ James hissed back with irritation. ‘If I think too much your way, I might give up here and now. It keeps me awake at night. But we must go through with this plan.’

Raes and Gillis detected more nervousness, pent-up anger, and doubt than they liked. They hoped James was only tired from the strain of the last days.

‘I realise what you said is true,’ James admitted. ‘I realise the hypocrisy of the aldermen families. Many of them are truly honest men, but they may all at one or other moment become my enemies. Thomas van Vaernewijc, for instance, supports us, and sends us William van Vaernewijc, to appoint as captain, but he will defend the interests of his family and when these are in danger because of me, they will fight me. That is why I need your friendship more than ever, and that is why I want you to remain in the shadow. You must form a base I can flee to. You could do me a great favour by telling me when I should step back honourably and peacefully. If I remove myself peacefully, the old *poorter* families may not consider me any longer a threat. Anyway, why are we being so cynical and sceptic? Who can predict what the

future holds in stock for us? I can't! I have to go through with this. We have advanced too far forward to withdraw. How else could Ghent thrive again? We have to force our neutrality in the war between the kings, and defend it. How else can we survive in business? Aren't we all desperate and on the brink of losing everything we possess?'

Raes and Gillis nodded.

'The dice are indeed thrown,' Gillis Vresele sighed. 'This is no time to have regrets, not before we even started. This night is a night of hope. A Saviour is born to us. We shall have to make it very clear to Ghent who exactly saved the town and for what purpose. Who knows? You might even get a monument on the Friday Market for having saved the town, James!'

Even James van Artevelde could laugh with that joke. The men drank a last cup, then two, and then Raes and Gillis went home. Not in a very straight line, though.

The Bijloke Address

Christmas Day and the day after passed calmly in Ghent. An attentive visitor might have remarked small groups of men gathering at street corners to converse. Heated discussions with broad gestures of arms and hands could be discerned. Here and there, the discussions might end in dispute, in shouts, an occasional fist was shaken, but no general grouping of large numbers of men happened on that day.

Also the women gathered, dressed in their finest dresses of the year, heavily cloaked, for the weather was very cold. They gossiped and broke off with stern faces, worried, wrinkled foreheads and high eyebrows. The women did not like what seemed to be in the making, trouble was coming, something drastic hung in the air, but they were also very well aware much had to change for their families to be saved from misery.

One day later, on the twenty-seventh of December of 1337, just before noon, Catherine de Coster heard frantic banging on her door. She opened, and saw a panting man stand in the *Kalanderberg*, a man she recognised vaguely as Thomas van Vaernewijc, an alderman of the law, a friend of her husband. Maes rushed past her, shouting he sought James van Artevelde. Maes van Vaernewijc was a tall, lean man, very elegantly dressed in a short tunic of the finest red wool, linings with furs, long and wide sleeves as was the fashion for wealthy knights, fine dark blue stockings and low, brown leather shoes. His heavy cloak of warm, blue wool was also lined with furs. Maes wore a red leather belt at which hung a long, finely decorated scabbard for a knife, as well as a red leather purse. He threw off his wide, darker hood. Maes had run and he had lost some of his usual dignity while he panted. He stood, seeking additional breath.

James van Artevelde had heard the noise too. He entered the hall from the door that led to his barns of the *Paddenhoek*, the street at the other side of his house. James's complex of rooms consisted of several houses he and other members of his family had bought and inter-connected. They led from one street, the *Kalanderberg*, to the other, the *Paddenhoek*.

Maes did not wait until James came to near him.

He gestured to Catherine's husband, crying, 'James, the people are coming! The guilds have called meetings in their guild halls this morning. They had heated discussions on the situation of Ghent, and they were in uproar, but they heard you had a solution to save the city from further disaster. The rumour is you were ready to propose something to the aldermen. The

guilds do not want to wait for that. The guildsmen are quite excited. Some have grabbed their arms. They are coming here, to your house. In a short while, they will arrive in the *Kalanderberg*. They will demand you to tell them how the city can be saved. We have an uprising on our hands, James! We cannot have blood spilled in Ghent! We cannot have them assault the *Schepenhuis*, the town hall, and have aldermen molested. What are you going to do?’

James van Artevelde did not at all answer Maes as hurriedly as the alderman would have wished. James took a chair and sat, pointed to another chair for Maes.

‘To begin with, Maes, the aldermen do not want blood spilled in Ghent, but they allow people to die from misery in the streets. Tell that to the aldermen first. Tell them I too want no bloodshed in Ghent, but I can hardly control every *poorter* of this town. The men are desperate, and that is not of my doing but the doing of the aldermen. Now, when the deans and their guildsmen arrive, I will speak to them.’

‘Not in the *kuipe*, not in the centre, James! The men are in such a state they are capable of assaulting the *stenen*, the houses of the best *poorters* of the town, murder them and steal their properties. We cannot have that! No speech in the Friday Market today!’

‘Well, they are coming here, Maes. I shall have to tell something to them, won’t I, for otherwise they may destroy my house! I shall tell them to walk to the *Bijloke* field. I’ll speak to the crowd outside the *kuipe*. Calm down! I’ll do my best to contain the guildsmen. You do your best to calm the aldermen. Refrain them from taking rash decisions, such as to launch the White Hoods on the crowd. Tell the aldermen to come to the *Bijloke* field. You have that right of meeting, and explain them they had better grind their teeth for a while and support us. Your brother William will be at my side. Tell the aldermen they had better stand by me, abide by my wishes and proposals, so that the crowd sees a united group of leading *poorters* presenting a sound solution to our lack of wool. They and you can help me directing the anger of the people to something positive.’

‘All right, all right! I came only to warn you,’ Maes van Vaernewijc replied, but James remarked how nervous the man was. Maes feared for his life and for his possessions.

‘I’ll call the aldermen together in the *Bijloke*. After you have addressed the guildsmen, please come to the *Schepenhuis*, and tell us how you felt about the assembly.’

‘I’ll do that,’ James promised.

At that moment James and Maes and the astonished Catherine heard the running of many feet and the wild shouts of a crowd approaching the *Kalanderberg*.

‘They are arriving,’ Maes said anxiously.

‘Yes, they are. Go, Maes, and don’t worry. I’ll handle them. Go quickly, or you may not be able to escape. Come to the *Paddenhoek*, the Toad’s Corner, that street will still be empty. If necessary, you’ll have to hide in my house until I can calm the people!’

Maes van Vaernewijc and James van Artevelde went to the *Paddenhoek*. Maes looked to left and right, saw the street empty, and he ran. James van Artevelde smiled.

Catherine de Coster had followed with growing amazement and with some amusement.

She asked, worried, ‘what are you going to do, James?’

James van Artevelde answered as naturally as if he had come in his hall to drink a cup of water, ‘I was re-arranging the horse stable. I am going to continue with my work. Close the front door, will you, Catherine, and if somebody bangs on the door, tell him or them I’m in the *Paddenhoek*, in my stable. Thank you, Catherine!’

Catherine grinned for so much cold blood, hoping with confidence James knew what he was doing. She waited until James had left the hall. Then she closed the door and bolted it with a large piece of oak wood.

The guildsmen of Ghent were walking from their guild halls to the *Kalanderberg* and at that moment they emerged in the street, close to the van Artevelde house.

The weavers had the shortest distance to walk. They had also been the first to set themselves in motion in a large group, sending messengers to the fullers' hall and to the shippers' hall. They proposed to demand explanations from James van Artevelde and from the aldermen. In their meeting, Raes van Lake had repeated the information that James van Artevelde was ready to propose a far-reaching solution to the issues of the town. The weavers' hall and the weavers' chapel stood at the *Waalpoort* near the *Ketelgracht* of the Scheldt. The weavers had only five minutes to pass the *Koestraat* to arrive in the *Kalanderberg*.

At the shippers' hall, Arnout and John de Hert had been shouting they held it as a certainty that James van Artevelde could bring business as before to the shipmasters. The small guilds, the smiths, the bakers, the butchers, the tailors, the shoemakers and leatherworkers among many more, had assembled at the shippers' hall near the abbey of the *Fremineuren*, the abbey of the Franciscan monks. The abbey and the shippers' hall stood near the *Fremineuren Bridge* over the Leie. The shippers were the largest guild among the small guilds, so often the small guilds together met in the shippers' hall. The small guilds, on the proposal of Arnout de Hert, walked down the *Veldstraat* in the direction of the centre, where they met the messenger sent from the weavers. They took to the right, into the *Voldersstraat*, the Fullers' Street, where nevertheless not many fullers lived, to emerge also at the *Kalanderberg*. They arrived somewhat later than the weavers at James van Artevelde's house.

John and Pieter Denout spoke to the fullers in the fullers' guild hall. They only moved after the messenger of the weavers arrived. Then, they had the longest way to go. Their hall was situated in the *Zachbroedersstraat*. They went in group in that street direction to the *kuipe*, walking into the *Winkelstraat* to the *Reep* along the Scheldt. They passed the *Braembrug*, took the *Brabantstraat*, where they met the last of the weavers, and then together, shouting and gesticulating with those laggards, they too passed the *Koestraat* to step into the *Kalanderberg*.

The largest guild of Ghent, the weavers, arrived first in the *Kalanderberg*. They knocked very hard on James van Artevelde's house door, although all the inhabitants of the street stood already on the cobbles in front of their houses, having heard the rolling thunder of hundreds of shouting men. Catherine de Coster opened a window and cried her husband was working in the *Paddenhoek*. Three to four hundred weavers turned their heads, then their feet, and they ran to the street around the corner, where they found the man they sought.

James van Artevelde leaned nonchalantly, legs crossed, against the gate of his stable. The weavers found James picking with a small knife at his nails. They were quite astonished by the serenity of James. The dean of the weavers stepped forward, followed by Raes van Lake. 'A good day to you, friends!' James called. 'How are you doing? Why have you come with so many?'

'Quit the small talk, James,' the dean of the weavers said with a wide gesture of his arm. 'You know why we are here. We heard you have a solution to our problems. Tell us what you have to say!'

James van Artevelde looked over the heads of the silent crowd as cool as a cucumber.

'Friends,' he began, without changing his position, 'you are too many for the *Paddenhoek*, and I guess many more will arrive soon. Let's go to the *Bijloke* Field. We can assemble there and breathe, and all can hear me. I do have a way of getting wool back to Ghent. Let's walk

together to the *Bijloke* in peace, and I will explain. Please ask your men to keep order. We don't want anybody hurt in Ghent so near to Christmas, don't we? I'll explain all in the *Bijloke*, we'll be at ease there!

'You can tell us here and now,' the dean insisted.

'No I can't! I don't want the *Gentenaars* to hear what I have to say from others. All must hear the same words from my lips. Come with me to the *Bijloke*!'

James took suddenly two long steps into the crowd, which opened, and though the dean fulminated angrily, James stepped on, down the *Paddenhoek*.

Nobody hindered James van Artevelde when he stepped resolutely on. He went to the *Voldersstraat*, back to the *Fremineuren*, passed the bridge there to the quarter of *Onderbergen* on the other side of the Leie, then he walked to the *Nieuwbrug* to the *Bijloke* convent. When he walked out of the *Paddenhoek*, two strong, tall weavers placed their shoulders to one another and they heaved James on that living, moving seat, so that the crowd could see him from far.

James did not refuse. He pointed down the *Voldersstraat* and shouted, 'to the *Bijloke*!'

The weavers took up the cry as theirs and repeated with a hundred coarse voices, 'to the *Bijloke*!'

At the end of the *Voldersstraat*, the weavers met the shippers and the other small guilds.

These men turned, shouting, 'to the *Bijloke*!'

James van Artevelde was still carried on shoulders. He remarked how men ran into the side streets and alleys to alert other guildsmen to join the assembly in the field outside the *kuipe*.

Women began to join the crowd.

When the mass of men and women arrived at the wooden *Fremineuren* Bridge over the Leie, more than a thousand people followed James van Artevelde.

James van Artevelde was brought to the middle of the *Bijloke* field, a large, almost square open space near the *Bijloke* abbey. In the middle of that space stood a lonely, old and huge lime-tree. The tree stood on a small hill, around which had been built a small wooden platform. It was there that James stopped to stand, arms high, open, asking the crowd for some patience until all their comrades had arrived. Many men and women were still arriving, emerging from all streets leading to the field. More and more women came. The women had left their kitchens. They had merely thrown a heavy cloak over their shoulders, still wearing their aprons. A few women arrived with very young children in their arms, babies still, covered by wool to keep them warm. The air was not freezing cold, but a sharp, humid wind cut through cloaks and hoods.

A large roaring of many hundreds of voices marked the arrival of the fullers, led by their haughty dean. They were welcomed with more shouting from the people already assembled. The men stood in the field, not according to their guilds, however. They mixed with neighbours and friends and engaged rapidly in heated conversation. And still, the crowd grew to thousands of men and women.

While James van Artevelde waited on the platform, looking for disturbances, ready to intervene with words, a wider circle opened around the platform. Many of his friends came then to stand around him and behind him.

Gillis Vresele and Raes van Lake had arrived, Wouter de Smet and Arnout de Hert walked from the groups of the smaller guilds forward. John de Hert and Pieter Denout came to the platform. Then also, hesitatingly, some of the aldermen arrived at the *Bijloke*, and they came to James van Artevelde. They stood at his side. A dozen and a half of the aldermen had come to support van Artevelde, men such as John uten Hove, John van Lovene, Everdey de Grutere

and Pieter Zoetaert! Supporters of James van Artevelde were Thomas van Vaernewijc, Hugh van Lembeke, James Masch, John Willade, Lievin Bevelant, John Moye, John van den Bossche and Philip van Oudenaarde. A few people James was surprised to see, for they could not be called his friends: Gillis de Tolnere, Sanders Rijm and Tonis Bette, members of the finer families of Ghent. Also the dean of the fullers stood below, John Breedbaard, and the dean of the lesser guilds, William Yoons, with the dean of the weavers' guild, James van Wackine. They all spoke and gesticulated heatedly, waiting for James to speak.

James van Artevelde waited until the *Bijloke* had filled with thousands upon thousands of eager men and women. Then he opened his arms and asked for silence. It took quite a time for the hissing to pass through the crowd. James started his speech, calmly speaking out loudly, slowly, at first telling only a few words and then a few words more.

'Friends, comrades,' he shouted, 'welcome! We have gathered here to propose to you how to end the oppression of our town, how to end the misery and the famine that threatens to kill us all. How can we regain our work, our trade, our prosperity? We need wool to spin, to weave, to dye, to full, to shear and to sell. We must regain the freedom to forge our destiny for ourselves. Our forefathers founded this city, made it a peaceful place for us to work in and to live in. They fought for the charters of the belfry that describe our freedoms and rights. Have we not now lost our freedoms and do we not curb our backs under the heartless authority of our rulers? The time has come to affirm our rights as free men, to break the yoke that weighs on the city, and to determine our fate ourselves! We do not want to flee from our city like thieves in the night, and we don't want to beg for alms in the streets. We are worthy men, who work hard and use our brains to seek the well-being by which we can live as men and women who hold their head high and proudly. Flanders has proven many times in the past that no ignominious yoke can be placed on our necks. The moment to repeat this message to our feudal lords has arrived! We must tell loud and clear we have been exploited long enough. We have suffered long enough! We have paid unjustified taxes by which our feudal lords have lived in opulence for long enough! What do we care about the quarrels between these feudal lords over a succession to a throne? Why should we have to continue to enrich the lords, so that they can revel in orgies of luxury while we suffer? Why should we hand over entire regions of our county, such as Lille, Douai, Béthune and Orchies for the private enjoyment of the lords?'

James had gradually made his voice angrier, shouted his words higher and louder with indignation, made a fist of his hands and banged his fists on the balustrade of the platform. He waited a few moments, took breath, and continued, again in a calmer tone.

'We want to work in peace and sell the result of our work at fair prices in freedom. *Vrijheid en Nering! Vrijheid en Nering!* Freedom and Crafts, that is what we want! Is that too much to ask? Do our lords have to deprive us of freedom and crafts? Did our lords have to take away from us the basis of our lives? Nobody should take away from us our very basic freedoms! We cannot allow that, for otherwise we would be nothing more than slaves, free men no longer! When we were free, we did not starve. When we were free, we could work and feed our families!'

James van Artevelde again paused a few moments, but now he went on rapidly.

'We have supported our lords loyally and fought for them in many battles in the last decades, but the current count forces us to pay taxes we cannot pay anymore because our children suffer. When the same count takes away from us our income, the income from our weaving, dyeing, fulling, how then can we continue paying the enormous taxes weighing on us? We do not want any longer to be thus humiliated, enslaved, famined! We want to work for our families. Many in Flanders and in France and also in Ghent believe we do not have the right

to demand the freedom to live by our work and our mind. I say to that allegation we respect the God-granted rights of count and king over the county, but we also have a right to live and to live well from our work. What do we care about obligations of payments and servitude agreed in the far past between our feudal lords, agreed merely for the liberty of a count to leave the prison of a king? We too have a God-given right to life, and for our life we must have wool and be able to deal and sell our cloth and have the coins to buy food. So, what should we do?’

James let these last words sink into the minds of the people. He remarked his words were being relayed to the last ranks. He waited until he had silence again. He changed a little the way he stood. Two hands still in fists, now held strongly at his hips, elbows opened, his right leg firmly in front of his left, he first bowed his head, then once more looked at the grave faces in front of him, and continued.

‘We must have wool, English wool, as much as we can transform to cloth! We must tell to who wants to hear it that we, free *Gentenaars*, will defend our freedom and take it up again in our own hands! We must tell our lords that if they want to wage wars between them, they can do as they like, but not at our expense! We must tell them we shall not interfere in their war, not wage it for them. We shall not tolerate suffering because of their wars, not any longer! We shall stay neutral in their conflict and we shall remain at peace with all of our neighbours. We want wool so that we can work. *Vrijheid en Nering!* Freedom and Crafts! That is our call!’

The crowd began to repeat ‘*Vrijheid en Nering!*’ from thousands of mouths, so that van Artevelde had to stop speaking for a while. He then opened his arms, asking for silence. ‘How can we realise our freedom and gain our wool, comrades? Well, we, the people of Ghent, must show our power! Freedom is not something we receive graciously. Freedom is not given, freedom is taken. Freedom is what we have to fight for and tell others we want it! We do not wish war and battles with our lords and with other lords, but we are ready to defend our freedom and our rights, as our forefathers did. I propose we take to arms to show our force, to show we are ready to fight for what we need, for Freedom and Crafts! Take up your *goedendags*, your mail coats, your swords, your shields, your axes and your helmets, and stand together! We propose to organise in groups of tens and hundreds as we have done before, according to our five parishes. We shall name five captains to lead our troops and rule our city. The captains will rule only militarily to guard our freedom of choice in the policy of neutrality in the conflict between the kings. We shall not take arms against the count and also not against the king of France. We shall keep friends with the king of England, but we shall fight against whoever tries to keep us from peace with any of those lords. Our lands shall be opened to the king of England, as long as he pays for what he needs for his army, and leaves us to work in peace. We shall not take sides in the war of the kings. King Edward will be glad to have us as friends. King Philip will not attack us, for he is too occupied with Guyenne, Gascony and England, and he too will be glad to keep us as friends soon. We do not dispute his right to certain taxes, and that income will still flow to his castles. Believe me, the two kings will uphold the neutrality of Ghent and of Flanders, the one king against the other. Do we violate our feudal obligations to our lords by these actions? We owe obedience to our lords, but when we starve, a higher kind of duty must prevail! We have a right to live. We have the right to be free. We have the right to refuse total obedience when the most elementary justice is denied to us, the justice by which we are allowed to live by right of God. A respectable citizen of Flanders has been seized and thrown in prison by our count, our respectable knight Zeger de Kortrijkzaan. We have been denied justice, so we are not bound to our ruler anymore! How shall we proceed?’

A few of the aldermen of the Law frowned their foreheads, but James van Artevelde continued, louder than before.

‘One of our captains shall lead as captain-in-chief. He shall lead our troops. The captains will rule the city, but that by right for the aldermen of the Law, who will continue to govern the city as before. The captains will not be the absolute masters of the city. They rule and guard in the name of our legally elected aldermen. The captains will act according to the laws and freedoms of Ghent!

We shall refute the obligations imposed on Flanders to liberate a count of Flanders from imprisonment in France. We want Lille, Douai, Béthune and Orchies back as regions of the inviolate county of Flanders. We shall not fight the king of England. We recognise our rightful lords, but we will ensure they respect our freedoms and our crafts.

As to the most concrete measures to alleviate the misery in Ghent, I propose the following. First, the wealthiest poorters should immediately offer substantial loans to the city. With the assembled funds, the neediest families must be helped. We shall send a delegation to the king of England to explain our position and to ask him to allow us wool. We shall send delegations of the city to Antwerp and to Dordrecht, to buy as much wool as we can get. The city shall pay for these bales and distribute it to the weavers as loans. We shall send a delegation to Paris to explain our neutrality. Our neutrality in the conflict between the kings is not directed against one or other, but a matter of survival for us. We shall also send delegates to the other Flemish cities, to Bruges and Ieper first of all, to ask for their support and to ask for the neutrality of the whole of Flanders. We shall ask Bruges and Ieper to defend the neutrality with us. Do you agree with these measures?’

The people in the *Bijloke* field shouted their agreement. The cry of ‘*Vrijheid en Nering*’ and ‘James van Artevelde for captain’ sounded high like an overwhelming thunder that rolled over the roofs of Ghent into the *kuipe* where the last of the aldermen had assembled, over the churches and towers, over the town hall and over the *stenen* of the Leliaert landowners, the last unthinking supporters of count and king.

The Government of the City

In the evening of the assembly at the *Bijloke* Field, James van Artevelde sat at his table in his hall, lost in thoughts. A candle was necessary, but James had lighted none. He loved the falling darkness when he had to reflect. He was keenly aware of how lonely he was since he had lost Agneete. His current wife, Catherine de Coster, was visiting friends. He enjoyed his loneliness. He felt tired, wasted. The strain of the speech and the enormous enthusiasm his words had evoked in the minds of the people of Ghent had been expected, even including the agreement of the aldermen present. The tension had nevertheless exhausted him.

James had always been a discreet man, working in loneliness, an introvert personality, cheerful in public, but generally tending to some form of melancholy, with bouts of low moods alternating with periods of extraordinary energy. The attention given to him by so many people tired his nerves more than he dared admit to himself. He had acted against his true nature today!

James did not enjoy his rest for long, for his friends Raes van Lake and Gillis Vresele burst in his hall. They didn’t knock on the door. They opened, cried their names, and were quite surprised to find the door unlocked but the hall in darkness. James stood and lighted three

candles, which he posed on the table. Gillis and Raes went sitting on either side of James, puzzled by his mood of aloofness.

‘That went well, didn’t it?’ Raes van Lake stated. ‘The people have agreed to your proposals. I heard no contestation. You have your legitimacy now, don’t you think? The aldermen have not protested in the *Bijloke*. They cheered, applauded and nodded all the way. They seemed relieved, if you ask my opinion!’

James van Artevelde considered what Raes had said.

‘Yes, it went quite well, I suppose,’ James answered with a sigh. ‘I could not have thought the crowd to react so instantly, spontaneously, and yet so passively. We did not expect otherwise. It was difficult, though, to have a debate with so many thousands present.’

‘Debate?’ wondered Gillis. ‘The aim was not to have a debate there, only the front rows could have heard the exchange of arguments of a debate. The people could have grumbled and refused your words. Instead of protesting, they cheered! What you said was what the people wanted to hear! At last somebody told them how to get out of their misery. Was that not marvellous?’

‘I spoke with the dean of the weavers, with James van Wackine,’ Raes van Lake continued.

‘He fully agrees with what we proposed. He will want to be recognised by the city as one of the three fully functional deans, though. He feels the three deans, not just the dean of the fullers and the overdean of the small guilds, should take part in the government of the city.’

‘That is only normal,’ James replied. ‘I will see to it that the dean of the weavers is treated at the same level as the other two deans. Still, I do not want to overturn everything in one throw. I can only formally admit the weavers in the town council as of fifteen August of next year, when the new aldermen get elected. I promise to then allow the weavers to play the role they deserve. I cannot change the aldermen for the time being, for the town might then not find my speech honest. I am not taking over power from the aldermen. I am not changing the aldermen, replacing them with men dedicated to me. I told the captains would only lead our troops for the aldermen. If I did otherwise, I might be called a dictator, which would stir up too much passion and too much discord, whereas we have to face the many challenges united. I am not strong enough to rule only by the people.’

‘Captains? Who will be appointed as captain? When?’ Gillis Vresele wondered.

James looked up.

‘Would you be a candidate?’ he asked, somewhat puzzled.

‘No, no, not at all,’ Gillis refused rapidly with a strong gesture of his hand. ‘I’m just curious. Has it already been decided who will be captain?’

‘Yes. I have the men. We already talked to them. You yourself proposed Gelnoot van Lens!’ James informed. ‘I’ll be captain for the parish of Saint John, and the captain of Saint John will hold the *Beleet der Stede*, the command of the town. Gelnoot van Lens will be my man for the parish of Saint Michael and William van Vaernewijc for the parish of Saint James. I can propose Peter van den Hovene for Sint Nicholas and William van Huse for Saint Peter.’

‘Gelnoot van Lens and William van Huse are weavers,’ Raes van Lake explained. ‘Gelnoot is a fine, loyal, honest, reliable man. He is the son of a wealthy, sympathetic, popular and very dignified *poorter* family. We could not have chosen better. He is also a very good friend, and family for, as you know, his sister married my elder son. I am a little more dubious about William van Huse. He seems loyal to our cause, but he did not show his hand too enthusiastically. He is ambitious. His family has been hit hard by the lack of wool. I believe he wants to become an alderman, eventually. I have not heard him protest against the current aldermen. He did not criticise them ever. He goes his own way and does not let us look into

his cards, but for the moment he seems to be loyal to us. He may change with the wind. I cannot trust him totally. There is an opportunistic streak in his character. Still, he too is a weaver, and like most weavers he knows the situation must change. He has nothing to lose and much to win.

Peter van den Hovene is a fuller, but one of the few fullers who understand that it is better to work with the weavers than against them. He trusts me and James. He is a reconciler, an intelligent man, a positive man. He is destined to become dean of the fullers one day, and he is really dedicated to our cause. He is a friend of the Denouts. When necessary, we can get messages to him via the Denouts. He listens to them.'

'William van Vaernewijc is the less popular figure among the ones I'll propose,' James van Artevelde reflected aloud. 'We need to have at least one knight and landowner among our captains, though. I must appease the fears and doubts of the landowner *poorters*. Our insurrection is not directed against them. William is proud, maybe a little haughty for the rest of us, but he is our access to the ancient lineages and to the Leliaerts. He can bring at least a few of the Leliaerts to acknowledge our purpose. His family is related to the de Herts, for Beatrise van Vaernewijc is married to John de Hert, a marriage of a dozen years and a very fine one. I have good contacts also with Thomas van Vaernewijc, the family head. I call him Maes and he does not object. He proposed his younger brother William. William is a sophisticated speaker, a great persuader, a suave and charming man. He is gifted with the talent of eloquence and of persuasion. He can be slick, but he is honest, I believe, in his dedication to the cause. I sensed in him real empathy for the misery of the people. He had the intelligence to understand a lot had to change in Ghent. Of course, in the end, he will want to have power returned to the traditional aldermen, but that is also what we want and have agreed, isn't it? As a knight, we can send him on missions to the kings and counts. He'll be better received by the noblemen than any other of us. Thomas van Vaernewijc has agreed to that role also, by the way, and so has James Masch. I trust William. He is an honest man. He'll tell me openly, assertively and simply what is on his mind, and he'll discuss.'

'The people should still vote for them,' Gillis Vresele remarked.

'They should. I thought of organising one more meeting in the *Bijloke* Field on Saint Pharaïldis Day, six days from now, to have them elected. I don't think other candidates will present themselves, and I'll throw my weight fully behind these names. Do you object?'

'No, of course not, the names are fine,' Gillis replied hastily. 'You should feel comfortable with the men who shall lead with you. The game is all up to you, now. The Pharaïldis group shall recede into the shadows, but we'll always be open to discuss matters with you. Please count on our support and on our advice.'

'I know I can count on you,' James confirmed.

'Corruption must end,' Raes van Lake brought up as another subject dear to him.

'I have not forgotten that issue,' van Artevelde nodded. 'The captains shall also serve as the city receivers. I, van Vaernewijc and van den Hovene will handle the Great Receipt, the taxes. Van Vaernewijc and van den Hovene will like that, for some money may stick to their fingers too, but I'll control the accounts. My wife Catherine shall help me with the accounts. Nobody in Ghent is as precise with numbers as Catherine. Gelnoot van Lens and William van Huse can handle the Lesser Receipts, the rents. They'll be honest about the income of the town, and those accounts are easier to control. I have thought of dismissing all of the city clerks. I don't know the corrupt ones from the truly honest ones. A few, I'll want to see exiled, because they have clearly committed frauds. The aldermen of the Law will see to the dismissals and a few

of the clerks will have to be brought to trial. I'll supervise, of course. That signal is an important one for the people.'

'So, how will the agenda look like?' Raes van Lake asked.

'On Saint Pharaïldis' Day, on the third of January, there will be a new meeting in the Bijloke to elect the captains,' James van Artevelde counted on his fingers. 'I cannot do that earlier. Two days later, I'll organise a meeting with the aldermen. Some things will have to change. I must explain this to the aldermen.

We'll have to prepare a parliament of Flanders, somewhere in a neutral place. It can't take place in Ghent, Bruges or Ieper. I thought of the convent at Eeklo, close to Ghent but not in our city. We'll need a couple of weeks to prepare for that meeting, send out envoys to explain our plan. The parliament cannot be called together before fifteen of January, before we can place the resolutions of Flanders at the feet of the kings of France and England. After that, we might meet the plenipotentiary of King Edward III at Leuven, the city of Brabant. We cannot give him the details of our proposal before the first of February.'

'Should you not try to speak to the king of England first and in person?' Gillis Vresele wondered.

'Maybe I should,' van Artevelde replied. 'I certainly must send a delegation of Ghent to England to ask for permission to negotiate with the count of Guelders in more detail.'

The count of Guelders was Reginald II the Black of Wassenberg. Reginald had first been married to Sophia Berthout, Lady of Mechelen in Brabant, so the count was at least to some extent aware of what happened in nearby Flanders. Currently, he was married to Eleanor of Woodstock, sister of King Edward III of England. Eleanor was still very young, merely nineteen, whereas Reginald was forty-seven. By his marriage Reginald was the brother-in-law of Edward III, a figure of fame and importance in the Low Countries. He was considered a stern but honest and trustful negotiator.

'If I go with our delegates to England, I'll be out of Ghent for a few days,' James continued. 'Who knows what shall be concocted behind my back. I might keep my journey a secret. I think I'd better not antagonise King Philip of France and count Louis of Nevers too openly for the moment! I must also consolidate my power in the town. So, I must stay in Ghent!'

'It is crucial to establish fine relations, relations of mutual trust, with the king of England,' Raes van Lake insisted in his opinion. 'Building relations take time. It would be good having a few short meetings with the king.'

'You are right,' James smiled. 'Fancy me, poor old James van Artevelde the trader, talking to kings! In what have you thrown me in, my friends?'

The men laughed.

James van Artevelde did not sail to England. He felt he had still to work at the hesitations of the city for and against his policy.

The next gathering of the people in the *Bijloke* took indeed place, as James van Artevelde had wished, on the third of January. Far fewer men took the time to vote for the captains. The candidates of James van Artevelde were elected without hesitation, with massive positive votes. James noted with interest and satisfaction that almost all the aldermen were present. The aldermen seemed glad to accept James's leadership for the moment. James had worked at his popularity, and taken the time to explain his policy, so that he had won many sceptics

over. Nobody from the ancient families contested his election as captain-in-chief responsible for the *Beleet der Stede*. From that instance on, James van Artevelde could feel himself the undisputed leader of Ghent. Aldermen and priests came to him to discuss the state of the town.

Two days later, on five January, the aldermen of Ghent held a special council meeting. Two hours before the official assembly of the twenty-six aldermen, the thirteen aldermen of the Law met with the captains in the *Schepenhuis*. It was not a meeting for presentations, for everybody knew everybody. The proceedings went much more cordially than James might have hoped for. Thomas van Vaernewijc presided the meeting. James received the right to speak early on.

James began to talk as soon as he could about the matters of the government of the town. He saw he had breached the subject maybe a little too soon than the aldermen were used to, but the men listened to him.

‘Honourable aldermen of the Law,’ he started, ‘you know as well as I our city is in need of reform. We need wool. We must declare our town neutral in the conflict between the kings of England and France. We must obtain our wool from England and our grain from France. The declaration of neutrality will most probably not be willingly accepted by France, but we cannot live without our quality wool. When you hold your council, please keep this in mind. The king of France may lay siege to Ghent, and he may block the transport of grain to our town. We cannot have it that a few of our merchants speculate on a dearth of grain. The prices of grain should therefore be fixed, and the hoarding of grain forbidden. The town should discreetly buy in grain and fill the staple and the warehouses. Furthermore, the peace of the town should be guaranteed.’

Thomas van Vaernewijc fell in, ‘we need more discipline in the town, James, and we know that. The aldermen should decide that all exiled people who hide in churches and abbeys should leave their hiding places. All the men who have been banished for violence or thefts by the towns of Flanders should leave our territory within three days, for we need the sympathy of the other towns of Flanders. If men remain hidden in the churches where they have found asylum, we should bring them out by force, also within three days. We install a curfew, and all people who remain in the streets wandering after curfew, should be heavily fined without mercy. Of course, the guards of the night watch and the priests and doctors and the midwives may, as before, visit the sick or the pregnant women.’

‘We want quarrels between individuals and between families to stop,’ James van Artevelde continued. ‘Until the Thursday after the Great Carnival of Lent, that means for about fifty days, all quarrels are to cease. These measures must be strictly enforced, so we, the captains, shall name a constable per district of Ghent. Each constable shall have at least ten men-at-arms to assist him in his work of keeping the peace. We must prohibit dancing and gambling in public gatherings for a time, because these are generally occasions for all kinds of brawls.’ Thomas van Vaernewijc added, ‘I think, my friends aldermen, that we can vote these measures in the council!’

‘In order to limit corruption,’ James said on, ‘the captains will take as part of their responsibilities the function of city receivers. I propose you vote for the dismissal of the two receivers, James Deynoot and Claes de Keyser, within one week. Also the city clerks should be dismissed. A few of them should be brought to trial. In these very hard times we cannot tolerate the least corruption. New city clerks should be hired and instilled with the mind-set of total honesty in their dealings for the town.’

‘If that should be done,’ an alderman shouted suddenly, ‘then also the deans of the guilds should be removed and replaced with incorruptible men. The new deans must see to it that the controllers of the staples, the *vinders* of the guilds, work with total integrity.’

‘I agree,’ James van Artevelde acquiesced immediately, ‘under the authority of the aldermen. The deans could be dismissed out of function immediately. The guilds can be summoned to present new deans, names that are known as honest men, names that please the aldermen as well as the guilds. We need people who serve Ghent well. We must, however, have new deans in place within two to three months at the latest. I shall want the weavers to participate in the government of the town, government from which they have hitherto been excluded.’

‘That can only be made to happen at the next election of the council,’ another alderman protested.

‘Indeed, of course,’ James conceded.

The aldermen then began to discuss about the number of guards that were to be assigned to the captains. James van Artevelde let the aldermen agree on fifteen *knapen*, guards, for the captains, and twenty-two for the captain of Saint John, for James van Artevelde. When Thomas van Vaernewijc seemed not to agree with these numbers, arguing the captain of the landowners was more in danger than the others, the aldermen allotted twenty guards to William van Vaernewijc. James did not react, but nodded in agreement.

There was some discussion over the sums that would be paid to the captains for their work. The captain of Saint John would receive about thirty pounds *Groot* or three hundred sixty pounds Parisis, the other captains twelve pounds *Groot* or one hundred forty-four pounds Parisis. James van Artevelde nodded with satisfaction. The aldermen smiled.

Other measures were proposed to send a delegation of aldermen to the king of England. James van Artevelde insisted he wanted that mission to be kept secret, and he told he would be no part of it. He asked that the mission would merely inform King Edward III of the intentions of Ghent, informing the king that a parliament would be called at around the fifteenth of January, during which the support of the entire county for the policy of armed neutrality in the conflict would be proposed. James wanted the agreement of the king for representatives of Flanders to discuss details for the buying of wool with the count of Guelders. The result of the negotiations would be binding from the moment they had been agreed upon, but they would be provisional until the king of England had accepted them formally or wanted to have the conditions changed. The aldermen of the Law applauded these proposals.

It was arranged a little later that other delegates of Ghent would go to the count, who was not in Ghent at that time, to explain him what the aldermen of Ghent had decided. James van Artevelde thought this last point not necessary, for surely, the men of the count among the aldermen would keep Louis of Nevers constantly abreast of the evolution in Ghent, but he understood the signals in the eyes of Thomas van Vaernewijc. Some hypocrisy was tolerated to keep up polite appearances. The aldermen acted since ages as if they did not know Louis of Nevers had his paid spies among the aldermen. The count had been absent from Ghent, but he had announced he was on his way to the *Gravensteen*, to his castle in Ghent, so the count was following the developments in his most loyal town with close interest.

Divided Loyalties

James van Artevelde returned home after the meeting in the Aldermen's Hall. Catherine de Coster waited for him at the dining table.

Catherine wondered, 'how did it go?'

'As planned,' James replied absent-mindedly and laconically, throwing off his cloak.

It was freezing cold outside and he trembled, either from the cold or from the pent-up tension.

'Everything you wanted has been accepted,' Catherine de Coster supposed.

'It has, yes,' James smiled more self-assured now than a few hours ago.

He felt tired again, wasted. He sank in a chair and looked at Catherine.

'I may need your help,' he introduced.

'With what?' Catherine asked, quite amazed.

Her husband never confided in her, least of all in his business. He never needed her help in anything, this James.

'I have been appointed as captain of the city, and also as overseer of the Great Receipt. I'll have to control all the receipts of the city, though. I'll have not enough time for those controls myself, and I do not have the patience to look through all the accounts and detect where somebody might be committing a fraud. I need someone with a keen eye for patterns, not for individual accounts but for anomalies in overviews, in regular payments that recur without justification. Could you do that work for me? We will be paid, of course, for holding the Great Receipt.'

'I'll help you if you ask me,' Catherine replied. 'I'll have to go to the town hall, then.'

'Yes, you'll have to. We'll be discreet about it.'

'So that nobody knows a woman controls the books?'

'Something like that,' James smiled.

James waited a little while, looking inquisitively at Catherine.

Then, he said, 'we have been married for a few years, Catherine, but there is no love lost between us, isn't there?'

'Our relationship was not founded on love, wasn't it, James? We sealed a pact, which satisfied us both, but we weren't exactly in love. I looked at you with respect and affection, but the love of youth indeed does not link us,' Catherine stated as if she were adding numbers, head bowed, looking at her fingers.

'Nor does passion,' James van Artevelde added.

He went to a cupboard, took a bottle of white Gascon wine and poured himself a glass. He offered one to Catherine, but she refused. He admired the glass, which was very elaborately blown, no doubt in a Venetian manufactory. The glass was coloured in various tints, was as beautiful and delicate as Catherine, and felt as cold in his hand. The glass had come with Catherine, and he judged the glass had never been filled entirely nor had it ever stood empty on his table.

Catherine sensed his doubts.

'I did try to be a good wife to you, James van Artevelde,' Catherine continued, 'but I never promised to give you the youthful, joyful love you apparently shared with your first wife.'

'Indeed, you didn't,' James toasted to her. 'I nevertheless also hoped for some warmer kind of contact between us.'

Catherine was astonished. She had never detected any need for warmth or tenderness in James. Was he regretting his current way of living with a cold, business-like woman?

'I think of you kindly,' Catherine stammered, almost whispering.

She had no need for a sweating man on her back. Not now.

‘I know you do,’ James asserted. ‘That way, however, no children will be born of our union. Do you wish children?’

‘Not necessarily, no,’ Catherine replied coolly. ‘Maybe someday later, when we know each other better. Not today.’

James van Artevelde nodded. His marriage had not really worked out as he might have hoped for, but what more could he expect? Catherine treated him with sincere deference and gentle inclination, but not with love and passion. They had not truly become intimate. The carnal needs of men Catherine obviously did not share and was not ready to acknowledge in James. She seemed totally uninterested in offspring. She cared for the children he already had, but like the supervisor of a business. The children did not enjoy much love from her. It was true Catherine had her hands full with the house, with her father’s interests she continued to serve, with James’s children, with her family ties and her friends. She handled the household money efficiently, and even part of James’s fortune. James had transferred some of his business ventures to Catherine. She worked from dawn to evening. He could not wish for more. He wished Agneete had not died. He felt lonely.

Count Louis of Nevers walked up and down his large hall in the *Gravensteen* of Ghent, in the Count’s Castle. He did not like the ghastly, dark, monster of a place! He found no elegance in its massive walls, grey stones, towers and bastions. He liked much more his beautiful and elegant castle of Male in Flanders. Still, the *Gravensteen* was a symbol of power, of dominance over the largest city of the county, so he knew he had to stay here for some periods of time, show the *Gentenaars* their lord was present. What he did like was to saunter on the stone boardwalk behind the crenulations and watch the buzz in the Saint Veerle Square. Louis had followed the developments in Ghent almost hour by hour, as spies and sympathisers for his cause kept him abreast of the events. He had cursed a lot. Ghent, the loyal Ghent, the passive Ghent, had deceived him, betrayed him. He acknowledged in hindsight the townsmen could not have acted otherwise as they had done. Had he stood in their shoes, he might have taken the same course. He should have talked to the king and tried to persuade him to leave the English merchants alone. His error had been not to have thought Edward III would have retaliated so soon, so drastic on his measures. Nobody had won anything with the blockage of English wool. The English king lost income, the French king lost income, he, Louis, lost trade and taxes, and Ghent was starving. Brabant and Hainault were working like hell, but Flanders was getting poor. Still, Louis of Nevers was lord over Flanders, and some of the acts of the aldermen and the captains had been entirely illegal and directed against him, the count. They had decided and acted without asking him. He should not tolerate Ghent and Flanders to act without his explicit consent!

‘Yet,’ Count Louis thought, how can I stop the cities of Flanders from doing as they like? I am the count, but how far reaches my power? It reaches only as far as the people of Flanders agree to recognise and honour it. What is my real power? Ultimately, power always comes from the arms, however hard I may cry the Flemish have to obey me. How many knights and warriors can I assemble? Five hundred, a thousand surely, two thousand at the very best. How many warriors can the cities bring against me? Would that not be fifty thousand to one hundred thousand? What am I but an empty shell in view of such numbers? My power is only moral. It is the only power I can hold on to, and the courtiers of France know that far better than I, which is why they laugh behind my back and why the king despises me. It is a power given by the king, for him to take back whenever he wishes, an important power too, but only

when it is guaranteed by the king. Why do the Flemish wonder why I remain loyal to the king? Without the army of the king of France, my power is only a token as compared to the real power of the cities. With the cities I can match the army of France. Without the cities, I am but a laughing stock at the court. Why do those damn Flemish cities refuse to acknowledge my leadership? They bow to me most of the time, but they mock me at the first occasion I might really need them. Damn the Flemings!’

The Athis treaty of 1305 specified quite clearly that the towns of Flanders had no right to appoint captains as military commanders! The count and his bailiffs should be leading the town militia! The clause should have consolidated the power of the count over the urban warriors of Flanders, but now, somebody else was using the power of the cities! The new strong man of Ghent, this van Artevelde, an illustrious nobody, had proclaimed publicly that Flanders should remain neutral in the conflict between the kings. That was not for him to decide! That man cried treason! Surely, Philip of Valois would regard the attitude of the *Gentenaars* as treason. He, Louis of Flanders, would be blamed for not having contained his people. The king of France would want to punish treason, so an army might be levied. The tediousness of it all! Which side should Louis chose? He would have to obey to his liege lord and to his wife, a king’s daughter, but Louis did feel the Flemish had a good excuse. No wool, no trade, no wealth, no work, so starvation in Ghent, and no taxes for count and king! Louis had tried to explain some of that logic to Philip of Valois, but the king had not wanted to listen. The king had his own logic, and the logic was that Edward III stood in his way still and always for the throne of France and galled his mind. As long as Edward III had not been driven back to his sombre island, the figure of the English king haunted Philip’s mind. Edward III had to be forced to acknowledge Philip as king of France. Philip had hoped it would have been a heavy blow to Edward’s finances to inhibit the English merchants from doing fine business in Flanders, mostly in selling their wool. In Philip’s logic, the interests of the Flemings played no role.

It was King Philip who had ordered the count to arrest the English merchants. The income from Flanders had diminished by one third, so also what Louis paid to the kingdom of France had diminished, although enormous special taxes had still to be paid to the throne of France. Flanders and Louis were in debt to France, and the debt remained unpaid. There was no way he, Louis, would ever be able to repay the king all that had been promised in the treaties. Philip of Valois must be well aware of that fact, for Louis had repeated it to all of Philip’s court advisors. The countryside of Flanders had been devastated years ago by the revolt of the peasants. The country knights had been decimated. The castellanies in the county were slowly recuperating, but suffered from the taxes.

So, what should he do? What could he do?

Asking for more money from the cities and from the castellanies was out of the question. There would be a new revolt. If Philip of Valois wanted more pounds, he would have to let Flanders get wool. That argument made immediate sense! It made sense to agree with the captains of Ghent on that point. Louis could explain that to the king. The king should not be angered. Louis had wanted to preserve the financial interests of the kingdom by agreeing to the neutrality of Flanders. What good could a financially failing Flanders do to the king of France? Philip of Valois could wage war with the gold of prosperous Flanders, though not in Flanders itself, but England was not present in Flanders. The English king held Guyenne and Gascony and Calais, but no parcel of land in Flanders! Was it not better to have the knights of Flanders fight against Edward III under the Oriflamme, and for Ghent to work for the treasury of the king? It might take many years before the war over Guyenne and Gascony were finished, and only then could the king direct his army north. Louis secretly had to admit he

agreed with the policy of James van Artevelde. He wanted to explain to the king the logic of his arguments.

The Leliaerts of Ghent, the most loyal supporters of the French king, had sent envoy after envoy to the court of France with letters explaining what had happened in Ghent. King Philip was well informed. The king grasped instantly the scope of the decisions made by the inhabitants of the city. The images that came to his mind first were the horror of treason and of revolt, images he knew well of Flanders. His county of the north was a land of stubborn men who would not abide by his conceptions of feudal obedience. Coming to a decision, Philip told his advisors and scribes to convoke his royal army at Amiens, for an attack on Flanders. The king would have to teach the Flemings once more a lesson.

At almost the same time Philip of Valois received letters informing him of a Flemish parliament meeting, soon to be held at Eeklo. He asked a few noblemen of his court to defend his interests at that gathering, among whom William of Auxonne, the bishop of Tournai. Also the blind king of Bohemia promised to intercede.

When Philip of Valois had ordered these envoys on, he again began to think. He cursed himself for once more having acted before having reflected thoroughly on the matter, but now he took the time and thought twice.

A new campaign against Flanders would not be the same as the campaign he had waged and won ten years ago. His army would not oppose a peasant army. This time, Philip would stand in the field against the coordinated militia of large, formidable, wealthy cities, which could also hire scores of mercenaries. Many knights of Flanders and certainly the knights of the cities might oppose him.

Also, Philip had to acknowledge the Flemish had a cause! Without wool, the damned Flemish would starve indeed, and general misery was a state no monarch could and should wish on his people. That was against all laws of chivalry! God might not consider Philip's soul favourably when he, the king, forced disaster and starvation upon his subjects. Philip took his relationship to God seriously. Had not God granted him the kingdom? How many times had he prayed for that honour? Philip decided it was better to threaten the Flemings, but not to act, not to bite yet. There was no harm in calling his army to assemble. A king had from time to time to demand his lords to demonstrate their loyalty. Philip would bring his army together, show his strength and force the Flemish into submission with the grandeur of his knights. It would be sufficient to rattle the swords! He would not lead his army to battle this time.

King Philip called on his two most faithful and most unscrupulous advisors, Raoul the count of Eu and his Marshal Robert de Bertrand, to reflect with them on how to react to the disturbing news from Ghent. Both these men agreed with the king. Better not to over-react now. They promised to think of a few counter-measures that with the joint threat of the army, would make the Flemish turn pale and think twice about their revolt.

Wool for Ghent

James van Artevelde remained in Ghent during that period. He neither travelled to England with Thomas van Vaerneuijck, nor did he participate in the parliament of Flanders at Eeklo.

He did not expect much from any meeting with Edward III before Flanders had decided to join Ghent so that the delegates could speak for a united county. The ambassadors of Ghent would merely ask to discuss details with the count of Guelders. No doubt Edward III would send his remarks, observations and orders to his plenipotentiary in the Low Countries.

As for the parliament of the cities and of the castellanies, James did not doubt about what the representatives would decide. The misery in Flanders became more acute with the day. Traders still survived, but the weavers and the fullers and the dyers suffered famine. The delegates from the Flemish towns would vote in favour of his policy, of the official position of the aldermen of Ghent. The castellanies had been bled to near death by the peasants' revolt. The lords of the castles had no wish for a new war. Most of the lords would agree listlessly with the viewpoints of Ghent.

A few days after the parliament session, which took place in the small town of Eeklo, very near Ghent, a signal that neither the count of Flanders nor the king of France could ignore, James heard from Giles de Tolnere, an alderman who seemed to be in favour of the new government, how the discussions had fared. The Flemish cities had unanimously voted for the Ghent armed policy of neutrality. They supported Ghent in its talks with delegates of the king of England. The representatives of the count of Flanders, even in the presence of delegates of the king of France, had not objected to the neutrality. The count too seemed to welcome the arrangement.

The only terrifying moment had been when the king of Bohemia had threatened the Flemish representatives with damnation, hell and death for the insult against their liege lord. King John of Bohemia was John I, already called the Blind because he had lost his eyesight about a year ago, count of Luxemburg and titular king of Poland, was a formidable person, Giles told, but being blind, the king was also unaware of the subtler attitudes of the representatives at the meeting, unaware of their bodily reactions of abhorrence or of agreement with the arguments discussed. John had been raised in Paris, and he was French by education. He lived more at the French court than at his castle of Prague. He seemed to have some knowledge of Flanders, maybe because his mother had been Margaret of Brabant. His outburst of anger had been heard politely, supported in silence, but further on ignored by almost everybody.

James talked about the negative reaction of the representatives of the king of France at the parliament with the aldermen. They found it prudent and proper to inform the French king about the reasons of their decision to pursue neutrality. Not once did the aldermen thought of associating the count in their move. The knights and aldermen John van Utenhove and Simon Parijs were delegated to the king with a message of peace, of dedication of Ghent to their overlord, but also with the firm wish to defend their policy as a matter of life and death. Once more, James van Artevelde preferred to remain in Ghent to consolidate his power basis.

James van Artevelde saw to it that the plan he had written on a piece of paper was executed point for point. In the beginning of February, he made sure an embassy of aldermen was sent to Leuven in the Duchy of Brabant to negotiate with the count of Guelders, brother-in-law of King Edward of England. James stayed in Ghent and continued to reorganise the defence of the city with the other captains.

The aldermen returned after a week with excellent news.

England and Flanders had been reconciled! Flanders could once more buy first quality wool on the staple of Dordrecht! The permission for obtaining wool was a provisional one until a more definite treaty could be signed. The aldermen who brought the good news to Ghent were John Willade and James Masch, both men members of the best families of Ghent.

Masch was by then entirely won for the cause van Artevelde had proposed, so the captains agreed for Masch to ride to Dordrecht with weaver-merchants and make final arrangements. The first supplies of wool arrived in Ghent in ships of Arnout de Hert.

When the first ship was seen to arrive on the Scheldt, shouts of joy rose over the roofs of the city and the people ran in great numbers to *Tussen Bruggen*, the inner port. The bells of all the churches chimed sonorously in the dry winter air. The bales of wool were brought in great triumph to the Wool Hall. The people of Ghent then streamed into the churches, where holy masses of thanksgiving were sung by the priests. Ghent could go back to work!

After the first ship, Arnout de Hert and other shippers unloaded bale after bale of the precious product.

James van Artevelde became the most popular, loved man of Ghent. Men thanked him profusely, old women kissed his hands.

In the meantime also, a parliament of the cities and the castellanies had been held in Bruges. Ghent presented at that meeting the arrangements agreed with the count of Guelders. Louis de Nevers, the count of Flanders, was present at that gathering. When the news of the arrangement negotiated by Ghent had officially been presented, the count held his two lips stiffly one upon the other. He did not refuse, consenting once more taciturnly to the agreements. The representatives of the king of France took note of the arrangement, but equally did not object. James van Artevelde surmised then the king had more or less accepted the position of the Flemish cities, found it hard to assemble a large army in the north when he was waging a war in the south, and was seeking for time. King Philip had threatened to confiscate all the goods of the *poorters* of Ghent. The empty threat was not executed, and a little later withdrawn. Peace seemed to be guaranteed for a few months at least, the time James van Artevelde needed to continue his diplomatic missions in Flanders and in the neighbouring countries.

Confrontation

Count Louis de Nevers, count of Flanders, resided in the beginning of March of 1338 in Ghent, in his *Gravensteen*. The count summoned James van Artevelde to the castle.

‘It is a trap! Find an excuse, do not go,’ Gillis Vresele advised. ‘The castle is under the count’s law. The aldermen of Ghent have no jurisdiction over what happens inside the castle. If the count has you thrown in his darkest dungeon, nobody in Ghent will be capable of doing anything against it.’

‘It is dangerous indeed,’ James van Artevelde replied. ‘It is also a unique occasion to explain to the count what we are doing and why. We do not fight the count, we accept his authority. We merely fight for our lives!’

‘A fine occasion you would have from out of a cold, humid cellar,’ John Denout remarked, adding to the fears of Gillis. ‘The count wants nothing else than thwarting the power of the cities. Your example of governing a city without the count, negotiating with foreign monarchs, bypassing the count in the most important decisions of state, is something he cannot tolerate. No man would. He must eliminate you. Going to the *Gravensteen* brings you in great peril. Do not go!’

‘Not going would be an act of fear, not of defiance,’ James put in. ‘I have to go, to show the count we are not afraid of him.’

‘Then go, but do not go alone,’ Gillis Vresele suggested.

‘The letter I received is for me alone,’ James replied. ‘Even if I went to the castle with aldermen or the like, the count might seize me. Did he not imprison traitorously Zeger de Kortijkzaan?’

‘When I said not alone, I didn’t mean for a few aldermen to accompany you. I meant a strong force of armed men. They shall not be allowed inside the castle, but they will stand at the gates and threaten the count with reprisals.’

‘Yes,’ Gelnoot van Lens added. ‘We, the captains, can call on the militia. Each captain can now assemble a few hundreds of guildsmen at arms in a wink’s time. We can gather our men, have a thousand or so men at arms posted at the gates of the castle, and block it. At least, the count will not consider it feasible to sneak you out and bring you to the prison of Rupelmonde. You would be a prisoner, but he too. Also, if you do not come out of the castle in the evening, we could storm the fortress. At this moment, James, there is only one language the count understands, and that is the language of power and of violence. Well, we can show him our power, and inside the castle you can threaten with the violence.’

James van Artevelde looked in astonishment at his friends. They were more ruthless than he had imagined!

‘You are right,’ he said. ‘We must tell the count we are determined. We must make a lasting impression on him. We are not weaklings. We can demonstrate our force, once and for all. The count must be made to feel that what is happening in Ghent is truly the wish of the people. He should not oppose what the people of our city want!’

‘I’ll make the preparations,’ Gelnoot van Lens proposed. ‘When should you appear at the court of the count?’

‘Tomorrow before noon.’

‘Then we shall order our militia to come together in the late morning,’ Gelnoot stated. ‘We shall be there.’

‘I don’t even know how to talk to a count,’ James worried.

‘You add “my lord” after every two sentences,’ John Denout smiled. ‘Take care not to accuse the man of any wrongdoing. He is a vain man and he has power. His courtiers tell him every moment how wise and marvellous he is. Men of power get angry quite rapidly at the least criticism and, being men of power, they are tempted to use their power. They are like a man who walks around at a fair with a new sword at his side. More often than not, the sword gets used. Flatter him, tell him how smart he is, how judicious his opinion and his decisions, even when he utters idiocies. Bow deep.’

‘Flattering and bowing deep is not what I am good at, usually, my mother hasn’t taught me how to do that,’ James curtly retorted.

‘Flattering is indeed not one of your strengths,’ John continued, smiling.

The next morning, James van Artevelde left his house in the *Kalanderberg*, accompanied by his twenty guards. Catherine de Coster kept brushing at his clothes when he stepped out of the door. She did not display any particular emotion beyond the desire of a housewife to have her work acknowledged and see her husband well dressed, but she remained standing at the door until James had walked down the street.

James was splendidly dressed in a short red tunic, his best belt around his waist with his purse and knife scabbard of the same, finely decorated leather, new brown stockings and shoes with tips that were a little longer than usual. The sleeves of his tunic were broad, according to the latest fashion. The colours of his tunic and stocking were subdued, but his cloth was of the finest made in Ghent. His cloak was wide, of green wool, and lined with furs. His hat was

placed nonchalantly, elegantly on his head. As he walked to the *Gravensteen*, more men in arms joined him. The men emerged from houses, from alleys, and larger groups formed in the streets. James wondered how the news of his presentation at the castle could have spread so wide and so rapidly. James remarked men waiting at their door, wearing a sword, an axe, a goedendag, a billhook, or a studded mace. Some of the men wore mail coats and a shield. They waited at their house, nodded a good day at James and then stepped behind him and his guards. James was oddly touched by this overt show of sympathy, but even as the crowd grew, he was a little disappointed. Not nearly enough men as was necessary followed him. When James passed the bridge to the Saint Veerle Square, his smile widened. The guilds had gathered on the square in front of the *Gravensteen*, and the guilds had placed their militia in formation. The banners were unfurled and whirled in the icy wind.

When James van Artevelde arrived in the square, the shouts of the waiting men grew to a thundering roll that repeated, ‘Artevelde, Artevelde, Ghent, Ghent!’ in ever louder noise. The king in Paris must have heard the war cries, for the sound reverberated against the high walls of the sombre *Gravensteen*. The count, inside, could not but hear the thrill of the shouts announcing the arrival of James van Artevelde, the air in his rooms quivering with the sound. The display of power that Ghent gave that day was tremendous, as thousands of warriors in arms stood disciplined behind their captains. The count’s castle was surrounded.

James walked proudly to the gates of the castle. There, he found the four captains of Ghent and about a dozen aldermen, among whom Maes van Vaernewijc and James Masch. The aldermen and the captains welcomed James van Artevelde, shook his hands. James opened his cloak, and once more the shouts of ‘van Artevelde! Ghent!’ shook the air.

James went to the wooden bridge and gate of the *Gravensteen*. A contingent of a dozen guards in the livery of the count waited for him, under the command of the bailiff. ‘How many guards does the count have in his castle?’ James van Artevelde wondered. ‘He can barely have a hundred! He may have mobilised a hundred more knights and their men-at-arms, as well as a few Leliaerts, but he cannot have more than a couple of hundred of warriors. Even within his high walls, he should be no match for our militia. If he imprisons me, he will be trapped in prison too. The *Gentenaars* will not let him leave the castle. I may be killed, but Ghent will take revenge on the insult to their liberties. Am I not a free *poorter* and a landowner of Ghent?’

Behind James van Artevelde, the captains began shouting orders and the ranks of the guildsmen were set in motion. The men ran to form a ring of four rows deep all around the castle. They placed large shields to form a wall of their own, a wall of steel along the stone walls, beyond the moat.

James looked over his shoulder. He saw how many men still came running out of the side streets. The captains had troops of hundreds of men positioned in the streets leading to the castle. Not only were these streets now blocked off, Gelnoot van Lens also placed a force of ten ranks deep right in front of the gate. Horses might be expected here, so he had three rows of men with goedendags put their pikes obliquely. James grinned. He had also not known the guilds possessed so many banners. The multitude of highly coloured banners, many wearing the insignia of the parishes, flowed in the wind.

The demonstration of power was not finished yet. Suddenly, before James entered into the courtyard, from another side street, arrived a large group of crossbowmen from the venerable guild of Saint George. The men ran in rows. They ran to the front of the ordered ranks, placed

pavises to the castle, their huge wooden shields, and they ostentatiously cranked their bows on curt orders and placed bolts in the troughs of their bows. They knelt behind the pavises and aimed at the crenellations of the castle. The militiamen of Ghent thus readied to assault the *Gravensteen*.

Finally, when the orders had died down, a strange silence hung over the Saint Veerle Square, as the militiamen waited, their captains haughtily parading, hands on their back, in front of the walls.

James van Artevelde, accompanied by the bailiff, entered the castle courtyard. He had been announced in style!

Count Louis of Nevers stood near a window on the tower of the herse and drawbridge of his castle. He had been looking at the scene of the on-running warriors of Ghent. He had wanted to see James van Artevelde arrive, accompanied by a few aldermen and a few guards, hoping to witness show his bailiff had humiliated the magistrates of Ghent by turning them away but for that one man, the van Artevelde. He had hoped to imprison van Artevelde immediately and ride that same day out of town with his prey. He had riders waiting north of Ghent, and these would have whipped van Artevelde to the prison of Rupelmonde, whereas he, the count, would have joined troops waiting for him at Male. Another strong force that had remained loyal to him stayed at Biervliet, a refuge of Leliaerts and knights banned from several Flemish towns, crude men, knights but ruthless warriors, faithful to their rightful lord. The plan had been to catch the man van Artevelde who shouted revolt, remove him from the city, and in the general confusion to attack the town with his knights to re-establish his pre-eminence. That would have made the other towns think again before they did something that displeased their lord!

Count Louis realised his plan had failed. When he saw van Artevelde step into his courtyard, he could still imprison the *poorter*, but none of his own men, himself included, would be capable of escaping from the castle. He would be the prisoner of Ghent. He could stay safely in the castle for some time, but far too many warriors had gathered in his courtyard to live for long on the meagre reserves amassed inside. The men of Ghent, determined and calm as they stood in their ranks on the Saint Veerle Square, calling and shouting their war cries, would be quite willing and capable of storming the castle. They could well capture it and kill everybody inside!

The count had asked of his counsellors who this James van Artevelde was, the man who had so suddenly come out of the dark to the forefront in Ghent. None of his French advisors had been able to say one word about van Artevelde. Van Artevelde was an illustrious non-entity, a common man without a past, suddenly become demagogue. Count Louis had to repeat the question to the Leliaert knights of Ghent. A relatively young knight, Ser John van Steenbeke, was the only one who dared to answer.

‘Van Artevelde is a man of a large, wealthy family of Ghent, my lord. Few nobles at your court, lord count, are as wealthy as the Arteveldes taken together. They must have originated from the town of Ertvelde north of Ghent, but they are *poorters* of our city. James van Artevelde’s father served the counts of Flanders loyally. He fought under William of Jülich in the Battle of the Golden Spurs. He lost part of his fortune to the king for having supported the cause of the counts before that battle. This may have created bitterness in the family.

The Arteveldes are no knights, but their daughters marry knights and their sons marry noble women. A Marie van Artevelde is married to Ser Gelnoot Damman. The Dammans are an ancient landowner family, very loyal to Your Highness. A brother of James, Francis van

Artevelde, has been castellan of the castle of Beveren, one of the fortresses around Ghent, which Francis held and defended during the peasant revolt, a dozen years ago.

With his brother William, James van Artevelde owns much land north of Ghent, along the Scheldt mostly, fine polder lands. The family works much at drying the polders and turning it into pastures. They also own lands near Axel and exploit the moors for peat.

They are landowners in the centre of the city. They own terrains and houses. Many of these houses are situated in the *Kalanderberg*, but they have possessions in several more of the better streets of the *kuipe*. There are also priests in their family. They own land and houses in which breweries are established.

The van Artevelde deal in everything that can make money. They are traders, and they have been successful in their business. Their relations, friends and business partners run wide in Ghent. They certainly do not put all their eggs in one basket. They are not really typical for Ghent in that they do not live from the cloth industry exclusively. They trade in grain, in wine, in beer, in metals, in livestock, in peat, in salt, and so on. Their compounded wealth must be enormous. They are intelligent and industrious, very enterprising men.

I believe James van Artevelde intervened the way he did not because of unselfishness and love of the people, but because his business and the business of his associates was hurt. I do not think he acted all alone.'

'Of course, of course, we have not expected differently,' Count Louis had replied.

Power of money he understood. James van Artevelde became a lot less super human after what John van Steenbeke told him. He formed a picture of James van Artevelde in his mind that fitted more realistically now what had happened and how the *poorters* of Flanders reacted. He thought he knew how to handle his man.

Count Louis of Nevers shivered. Damn Flemish! He drew his cloak tighter around his body and hurried back to his great hall, down the flights of stairs, to stand near the large hearth among his noblemen. Louis had James van Artevelde wait for a long time still, while he discussed the situation with his counsellors. Then, he dismissed most of his knights and also the Leliaerts of Ghent, and remained with about half a dozen of his courtiers in the wide hall. The count then ordered van Artevelde to be brought in.

When James van Artevelde entered the hall, preceded and followed by a guard in arms, he still had his cloak on. It had been cold in the waiting room. James walked through the finely carved and open door, folding his cloak over one arm. He looked up and admired the fine tapestries that covered the walls. He looked at the ceiling, at the floor, amazed at the richness of the decorations and the incredible thickness of the beams. So this was the hall in which so many counts of Flanders had met the nobles of Flanders! James was not impressed by the men in the hall, much more by the splendour of Flemish art assembled in this room. His eyes lowered and wandered to the count.

Count Louis de Nevers had faced the hearth, warming his outstretched hands, seemingly oblivious of who had entered the hall. He now turned as if he had been importuned by an undesirable presence, anger flaring on his face. James van Artevelde went to stand at some distance, three paces from the count. He nodded to the knights he knew, and then bowed and made a gesture of reverence. He did not bow deeply, he went not to his knees.

Around the count stood knights and advisors, richly dressed in short tunics folded in many plies from the waist down to their knees. Most of the tunics had been dyed in harsh colours, in blue, green and red. A few of the men wore swords at their side, all had long daggers at their belts. More men than usual at the court wore coats of mail under surcoats, with their badges proudly embroidered on the fine wool.

The count first turned his back to van Artevelde, ignoring the bow of the *Gentenaar*. The count was not a very imposing figure, not tall, not particularly handsome, bags of fat appearing in the face, nondescript eyes looking into a void, but the count did move elegantly. James van Artevelde thought he detected nervousness in the steps of the Count around the fire, an anxiousness that he found a little strange, for he, van Artevelde, had stepped into the lions' den, not the contrary.

The count pretended the warming of his hands was more important than to address van Artevelde. Van Artevelde frowned. How superfluous was it to be impolite, to despise!

The count turned once more, and said finally, 'Mer van Artevelde, a good day to you. We never met. I wanted to have a talk with you.'

The count paused for a few moments, gauging the man before him. Louis saw a tall, rather handsome, intelligent man with cold, unyielding eyes, a somewhat hard, determined face. Van Artevelde looked as the count had imagined. He did not feel, though, this van Artevelde to be a very imposing man. The king of Bohemia was an imposing figure, even blind, not this common *poorter*. The count relaxed, became less nervous than a few moments ago.

'I had to see and talk to the famous wise man of Ghent! Your name has suddenly become known throughout Flanders. You have stirred up the minds of my people, Mer van Artevelde!'

James van Artevelde wondered whether he had to answer on a statement. The count had spat out the words as if they formed a question. Louis de Nevers had also addressed him as if he addressed a child or in any case a man far inferior to him. Had the count called James in to scold him?

'I formulated in words what laid strong in the minds of the people, lord. We live from the transformation of wool. We had no wool. Ghent was starving. We had to have wool to live. In all the towns of Flanders the same preoccupation dominated. So we took our wool!'

'Yes, the approval of what you proposed has been unanimous in the Flemish cities. English wool has been delivered to Ghent, I hear. It will soon also arrive in the other towns. You realise you have acted against the will of your lord and your king?'

'I acted with the explicit approval of the towns of Flanders and Ghent in particular. I acted according to a higher order to the needs of the people. God cannot wish the people to suffer and to starve, husbands to have no work to bring in money for their family. I had a duty to help my friends and the men and women of our town.'

'Oh, you had a God-given duty, had you? Why did God not make you count or king? Have you had strange dreams lately, Mer van Artevelde? Has God appeared to you in all His Glory, telling you what to do? To take the prerogatives of your lords and abuse of them?'

Van Artevelde did not answer, bowed his head to what he considered blasphemy.

Louis de Nevers again turned his back to van Artevelde.

Facing the fire, the count said, 'you must fear me much, Mer van Artevelde, to have brought so many men shouting drunkenly at my gate. Do you intend to have them enter my courtyard and plunder my castle?'

'My friends accompanied me, lord!' James only replied.

James tried to remain polite, though he remarked how each time Louis de Nevers spat out his name as if to mock him. For the first time, also van Artevelde frowned his forehead in growing anger.

'Arrogant, haughty, provocative and very drunken friends you have, Mer van Artevelde! You dare to come to daunt your lord to whom you owe obedience!'

The count turned back to face van Artevelde, who still said nothing. Louis of Nevers stared into James's eyes, hoping to discover fear. He met steel.

'What is it you really want, Mer van Artevelde, you a trader?' the count suddenly snapped. 'You are a wealthy man, I heard. You are out for power and for honour, I guess, the two other forces a man like you, not highborn, might seek. I can give you those too, van Artevelde! I can make a knight of you. I can make you *ruwaard*, military leader, not merely of Ghent but of the whole of Flanders. *Ruwaard* of Flanders! You can lead my troops! Ser van Artevelde, *ruwaard* of Flanders! Of course, you would have to wear my livery and rule in my name. Would you then not have wealth, power and glory at the same time? How would you like that? You would henceforth be called Ser James van Artevelde, have a fine steen in Ghent, a castellany maybe, and your children too would be called ladies and knights for eternity. As my *ruwaard*, your fortune would be guaranteed, and you would be a welcome guest at our court, at the court of the king, even one of our major advisors. The county owes you the title! You have brought wool to Flanders, and hence its main source of income. How do you call that in Ghent? *Vrijheid en Nering*! Freedom and Income! The king of France seems to have understood wool is necessary to one of his most important counties. What shall we do with you, Ser van Artevelde? Would you like being the *ruwaard* of Flanders? The people will like that!'

James van Artevelde had followed the images the count had called to his mind. He considered the words of Louis de Nevers as so many insults and traps. He did not like the man he saw before him. The count was trying to bribe him, to buy him, to control the militia of the cities, to add a popular figure to his court and then to use him, to discredit him in the eyes of the people. The county might be better off, for the peace between towns and count would be guaranteed, and he, James van Artevelde, would be better off too! He would become wealthier still, and a knighthood would overwhelm Catherine with pride. Maybe her looks at him would feel warmer. He would, however, lose his soul, his freedom, his independence of thought. From the moment he would say yes, make me *ruwaard*, he would be the count's man, his puppy, he would have to abide by what the count prescribed for him! How long would he last as the popular van Artevelde? How long still would he be called the wise man of Ghent? What was his honour still worth when this count had done with him? James had a choice to make, a hard choice, and the count waited on the choice with eager eyes. Louis of Nevers saw the flash of greed in the eyes of van Artevelde. He thought he had won the man over, but then he noticed how the eyes changed to a soft glow, to deepen to hard determination, and he realised he had lost his wager.

James said, 'I have heard the calling of the suffering people, lord count.'

James spoke slowly, with a low voice so that only the count could hear and the count came nearer to James to hear better, probably also to impress James more with his suave elegance. Louis de Nevers held his head now obliquely as if wanting to hear well. It was another rehearsed means of lowering the dignity of James.

'I acted out of empathy with the people,' James resumed, 'and I found it a Christian duty to help my fellow-citizens out of their misery. I cannot ask for other rewards but to see Ghent a prosperous city again. Any other reward would be unseemly, theft, and wasting of confidence. I'm afraid, lord count, I cannot accept what you propose. I must remain captain of Ghent and Mer van Artevelde. My work is not yet finished.'

The count recoiled, took a step back to his hearth.

'We may then well be opponents soon, Mer van Artevelde! I will not tolerate decisions to be made in Ghent behind my back!' the count screamed threateningly. 'There can only be one

lord in Flanders, the lord appointed by God from a dynasty that has been in Jerusalem and that has had a famous, glorious, past. The family of your counts shall last for centuries to come, whereas you will vanish into oblivion! You must know what has happened in the past when the power of the count and of the king were challenged in Flanders. Battles with thousands of dead men have ensued, Mer James, for count and king must also defend their rights. Do you wish devastation for Flanders? If you wish it, you may well receive it! Count and king have a duty too to their name and to their assignment by God. I repeat, there can be only one ruler in Flanders, and that position is not to be challenged by anybody of low birth!’

James hesitated, then he replied, ‘I do not challenge the authority of the count or of the king. When decisions of the wrong counsellors abase the people and bring us misery, then we all, the people, the aldermen and the captains, desire decent alternatives that allow us our dignity. We have dignity too, a dignity that has not been practised in courts, in castles or splendid manors under fine names of old. Our dignity is small, for certain humble, but that dignity too is exercised facing Christ. I have to pursue my destiny. I must lead Flanders and Ghent back to prosperity. Then I will go back to my business. If God wants to punish me for that vow, so be it.’

‘If you try to oppose me, van Artevelde,’ the count flared up, ‘then you have to fear my wrath and the wrath of the king. You can go now, everything is said!’

The count dismissed van Artevelde with a gesture of his hand and he turned his back again to look at the flames in the hearth. The conversation was at an end and had been useless for both. Two noblemen of the count’s entourage took James by the arms, but in anger James drew his body out of their grip, menacing the nobles with fierce eyes. The men did not try holding van Artevelde any longer. James too turned on his heels, pronounced no formula of goodbye or farewell, did not bow to a man who had his back on him, and strode with his long legs to the door of the great hall. For a few moments, he expected a sword through his body, but he drew the door open, unharmed. He reached the courtyard unescorted, but did not look back.

Nobody came after James van Artevelde to accompany him to the gate, but also nobody shouted to arrest him.

The bailiff of Ghent waited still at the gate, gazing at the hordes of armed men that might yet be directed at the castle. When the bailiff heard steps behind him, he looked around and saw James van Artevelde striding quickly out of the cobbled yard, walk onto the bridge. James looked at the bailiff and the bailiff, who knew James well, looked at van Artevelde. The two men nodded, grinned, and since the bailiff heard nobody shout from the great hall to arrest or to stop Artevelde, he crossed his arms at his breast and did not move.

When James van Artevelde arrived at the end of the bridge, in the Saint Veerle Square, new shouts rose from the crowd of guildsmen. James van Artevelde was taken up by the group of aldermen and captains of Ghent who had waited patiently for him.

The bailiff sighed with relief. He waited at the gate until the warriors of the guilds marched off the square with flying banners. He too then ordered his crossbowmen and men-at-arms from behind the crenellations of the *Gravensteen* to their quarters.

When James van Artevelde walked out unharmed from the Gravensteen, the counsellors of Count Louis were outraged. Most of his advisors proposed to have van Artevelde, the traitor, to be assassinated. Knights from ancient Leliaert families of Ghent present in the castle,

propose to hire Italian assassins. In fact, the assassins had already been hired and were on their way. The count, hearing shouting men to his right and to his left, agreed. Yes, van Artevelde should be killed, but Ghent should never know who had ordered the assassination! Do it quick and clean!

Only a little later already, the count regretted not having stood up to his advisors. They had been so bloodthirsty and insisting! What else could he have done than to give in? It was probably indeed for the better that the van Artevelde man vanished from the earth, dispensed by an anonymous murderer, who might have been hired by any adversary of the captain in Ghent. Still, he didn't like devious murders! They were beneath his dignity, and proved his weakness. He would everybody to want to know he had killed this man, van Artevelde, because the fellow had insulted his count.

In the following weeks of the beginning of March of 1338, three attempts at assassination of James van Artevelde took place. In two out of three of these attempts, the guards of James foiled the attacks on his person. James's guards did not exactly stride ostentatiously behind him as an escort of honour. They dispersed around him and secured the streets he entered. They learned quickly to be alert always, to spot people that were dressed out of the ordinary, or walked strangely. They challenged these men openly. In the third attack the assassin actually avoided the guards and reached James, but James had remarked the dark man dressed in a wide, brown cloak and wide hat at some distance, because the man seemed to concentrate on him and acted quite differently from the other men in the streets.

'Watch out for unusual patterns in the people you meet,' Gillis Vresele had warned James against such eventualities.

When the bandit jumped on James in front of his house, James had his long dagger ready in his hands and in the belly of the very surprised man before the other could hack with his sword on James. Only moments later, five men sat on the hired murderer. James had then asked in French of the dying man under whose orders he acted, whereupon the man in his last death throngs, blood bubbling from his mouth, still hoping for some mercy, had distinctly pronounced the words of 'il conte'.

James van Artevelde saw to it that all the *poorters* of Ghent knew the count wanted the captain of Saint John dead. This frightened some of the men of Ghent, but it angered many more. In the days after the attempts, the men of Ghent had then all put on the white hood in the streets, the sign of the militia of the town. Some men had begun to saunter around the *Gravensteen*, their hands on daggers almost as long as swords. The *Leliaerts* did not dare to come out of their houses. The men below the *Gravensteen* shouted Louis de Nevers should put on the white hood equally, to show he agreed with van Artevelde. Louis looked at the men from behind his crenellations, and he took a fright.

The drawbridge to the castle of the counts had first been permanently lowered, then it had been raised for a few days. Late on an evening, the drawbridge was suddenly lowered again, to let pass a strong contingent of knights dressed in mail coats and steel breastplates, armour also under trappers on their horses. The knights shielded the count leaving Ghent in a hurry for his castle of Male. Count Louis of Nevers fled his loyal Ghent. He feared to be imprisoned by the White Hoods, the city militia, as he had once been held prisoner in Bruges.

Biervliet

Raoul the count of Eu and Marshal Robert de Bertrand came up with a series of proposals for measures against the Flemish cities to King Philip of Valois in Mid-March of 1338.

They had noticed that Ghent would hold in March its greatest spring fair on the Sunday of Laetare. Many foreign traders visited Ghent at that time. English, German, French, Lombard merchants and traders of the neighbouring counties used this period to buy cloth in Ghent, the cloth that had been produced in the winter months, and they negotiated new contracts for the rest of the year. Laetare, at the end of March, was therefore a good date to hit Ghent where it hurt: in its trade. Hard measures would make a great and lasting impression, and maybe scare away the traders from Ghent and Flanders from negotiating long-term business relations.

On the twenty-third of March, when many foreigners had already arrived in Ghent, the appalling news spread that Count Louis de Nevers had decapitated Ser Zeger de Kortrijkzaan in his castle and prison of Rupelmonde. A wave of indignation, horror, disapproval and outright hatred swept through Ghent and Flanders. The blame was squarely put on the count of Flanders, but everyone knew the order had come from Paris.

The next day, Raoul the count of Eu and Robert de Bertrand had royal letters be delivered to Ghent, signed two weeks earlier by the king. Philip of Valois reminded the aldermen that Count Robert of Béthune had agreed to have the walls of his cities of Flanders to be torn down. The king ordered Ghent to abide by the treaty and hence to have its defence walls and towers demolished.

That same day, the bishop of Senlis and the abbot of Saint Denis pronounced solemnly the excommunication of Flanders in the market place of Tournai. The bishops had that right, given to the king of France by Pope Clement V many years ago, as part of one of the previous treaties between Flanders and France. Henceforth, no holy masses could be sung anymore in Flanders, and no sacraments given to the people.

Flanders ignored the measures of the king. No walls were demolished in any city of Flanders. James van Artevelde and the aldermen of Ghent sent John van den Bossche to the prince-bishop of Liège to consult with the bishop and his scholars on means of suspending the interdict, which had not been inflicted by the present pope. Monks from the main orders of Ghent such as the Friars Minor accompanied this delegation. Liège was an important spiritual centre where many religious scholars and theologians lived and studied. Ghent hoped Liège might contest the legality in canonical law of the interdict pronounced by the French bishops.

At about the same time, the aldermen of Ghent heard that their ambassadors to Paris, Simon Parijs and John van Utenhove, had been detained at Tournai during their return. Ghent then asked for renewed negotiations with the king, hoping for a truce. Maes van Vaernewijc and Lievin van Beveland, two aldermen, were delegated to meet with representatives of the king at Deinze and Lille, but these talks did not result in any change in the bellicose attitude of the King. No truce would be granted to Flanders. Flanders had to suffer the wrath of the king.

The situation deteriorated further, for at the beginning of April the *Connétable* of France, the military leader of the king, arrived with a first and considerable contingent of royal troops at Tournai. The troops began to harass the Flemish towns of the south of Flanders.

A few days later, at eleven April, King Philip VI of Valois arrived with his court at Tournai, joining the army with yet more troops. The king still temporised, however. He did not attack Flanders, he did not seek a decisive battle. He thought the basis of insurrection in Flanders

focused on Ghent, and he had no high regards for the determination of that city. He hoped Ghent might be captured easily by a few strong men. Once Ghent submitted to his will, Flanders would be totally inclined to accept his new demands. He would then not need to give battle. He put his men of Biervliet to good use.

On the Saturday before Easter, the guards standing high on the tower of the Saint Nicholas Church of Ghent remarked a considerable group of riders approaching Ghent. One of the guards ran down the tower, sounded the alarm, and soon the bell Roeland sent its low, moaning, ominous sounds rolling over the town. Roeland created a panic in Ghent.

The captains gathered the militia of the town in no time. The White Hoods and the Ribalds gathered in the Friday Market. They ran from there to the walls and fortifications of the town, where hundreds of militiamen joined them.

The riders were no troops of the French army. They came from the fortress of Biervliet, a small fortified town on the very wide estuary of the western Scheldt north of Ghent. This was a stronghold where many *Leliaert* knights had fled to many years ago, especially after the people of Ghent had massacred many of their kind in the aftermath of the Battle of Cadzand, where an English fleet led by the bishop of Lincoln had defeated a Flemish army of the count. The riders saw they could not surprise Ghent. The city was too heavily defended. At the sight of the great numbers of crossbowmen and guildsmen at arms on the walls, the forts, the gates and along the waterways of Ghent, they rapidly withdrew.

It was by then eleven April. James van Artevelde and the other captains met on the walls to watch the horse riders disperse and retreat.

‘Why do they withdraw, why don’t they attack?’ Gelnoot van Lens wondered.

‘They have seen we are too numerous to handle. Their surprise has failed. They must be waiting for the army of France to appear,’ William van Vaerneuwijc suggested.

‘They rode straight at the town,’ William van Huse remarked. ‘Had we not run to our defences so quickly, they would already have entered the city and devastated the *Schepenhuis*, the town hall. I don’t think they were waiting for the French army. We have had no messengers from our forts, further out, notifying us of any advance of the army. No, this was an initiative of Biervliet only!’

‘Send out guards on horses west, south and south-east,’ James van Artevelde ordered. ‘We must know whether the French army has moved. Send also a group of riders after the knights of Biervliet. We must know what those troops are up to. Do they retreat to Biervliet, or do they assemble with more troops close to Ghent?’

Peter van den Hovene took command of the guards that were to scout around Ghent, to the south. Gelnoot van Lens rode north in pursuit of the *Leliaerts*. James van Artevelde, William van Huse and William van Vaerneuwijc took command each of a part of the defences, of the militia on the fortifications. They waited anxiously and constantly added armed men to their forces. The tension in Ghent rose. James van Artevelde had heralds call the message that the captains had the situation under control. The remaining men, women and children of Ghent should not fear.

On the day of Easter, the *Gentenaars* celebrated their holy masses on the walls. That same day, messengers returned from the scouting groups led by the two captains van Lens and van den Hovene. The news overjoyed James van Artevelde. The French army at Tournai had not moved, and the *Leliaert* knights had returned to Biervliet. James allowed most of his troops at the walls to return home. He kept strong groups at guard on the walls and at the gates of the

town. He patrolled men on the stretches where Ghent had no walls but was protected by marshes.

After three more days of waiting, no new enemy troops arriving, the tension in Ghent diminished. James van Artevelde sent still more men home.

The captains van Lens and van den Hovene returned to Ghent, but other scouts were sent out to constantly assess the situation around Tournai and Biervliet.

The captains then began to regard Biervliet as a serious thorn in the foot of Ghent, one worry too much. They conferred. The captains did not debate for a long time. They decided to attack the *Leliaerts* of Biervliet. The presence of a force of knights who would always try to thwart the designs of the current captains, aldermen and deans of Ghent formed a permanent danger. These *Leliaert* knights had other members of their families still in Ghent, which might revolt at a surprise attack. James van Artevelde could not tolerate the danger that Biervliet represented. Ghent had to feel safe, not constantly under threat. He had to make sure the regions surrounding Ghent were loyal and would not present a threat.

Since there was still a good chance that the French army might yet launch a sudden attack, it was adamant to follow its movements. Groups of scouting men-at-arms had already been dispatched to that work. The French army had also to be delayed after it set in motion, so the captains of Ghent destroyed the bridge over the Leie at Deinze. Then, the captains made the trumpets sound and the drum calls roll in the *Kouter*, from where the Ghent militia would leave the next day for Biervliet.

On the twenty-third of April, the captains, aldermen and deans with the guildsmen assembled in good order and departed from the *Kouter* at a fast march. They were accompanied by the White Hoods and by the Ribalds who drew the siege engines of Ghent with them. These siege engines had been rolled out of the *Waalpoort* where they had been preciously preserved.

Though ancient, the engines could help the *Gentenaars* breach the gates of Biervliet. It was entered in the accounts of Ghent that the militia left for Biervliet to restore peace, lawfulness, freedom and income in the land of Ghent. The army of Ghent marched in long, impressive and disciplined rows, banners flying, along the thirty miles from the centrum of Ghent over Zelzate and Assenede northwards to Biervliet.

James van Artevelde marched at the head of the troops. He was very much astonished about how normal this seemed. James was the captain-in-chief of the militia of Ghent, of course, so everybody seemed to take it for granted he led the army. He had been appointed to hold the *Beleed der Stede*, however, the government of the city, not necessarily to be a war-leader, yet here he marched at the sounds of trumpets and drums! He took command easily, as if it were the most natural way of things, but he was very nervous! His face didn't change from its usual appearance, but his lips twitched and he constantly fumbled with his fingers. James as a fine organiser, a daring trader, a ruthless pursuer of his interests, a pitiless negotiator, charming with women and men, and mindful of details. He could focus on his task, did not lack in energy, was fast and could come up with creative new solutions to problems. Ghent knew him to be fearless in business. He had, however, never commanded an army of thousands of warriors, with battalions of different characteristics such as men-at-arms on foot and on horse, knights in armour, troops of crossbowmen, men with *goedendags*, swords and axes. Each such group had to be used separately for its abilities like the members of an organism of which the captain-in-chief was the brain. Could James van Artevelde assemble and use such an organism? This was not an easy task. I, Jehan Terhagen, remembered how the philosopher Plato had made Socrates say the ancient Athenians chose the best baker, the best butcher for their bread and meat, but any man among them as *strategos* or leader of armies, men who had

proved no special abilities for this function before. That was not the best of choices for war leaders, Socrates implied. Yet, Ghent had done the same! Could any intelligent man lead an army? Did one not need special abilities and special training for war? How would James van Artevelde, the trader, do in a real battle? Would he be up to his task? I was sure James was asking himself the same question! And yet the man rode and marched amidst his warriors, joking and laughing with the militiamen who indeed considered him as their all-knowing leader, their war-father. James had to show confidence and light-heartedness, for otherwise his army would have deserted him to the last man before arriving at Biervliet.

Biervliet rose out of the lowlands, high, imposing, and shining like the New Jerusalem. James van Artevelde had seen the town and its harbour before, and he was each time thrilled to view what man could create out of stone and mortar in such a nondescript place. The town had been built by a Flemish count to have access to the western estuary of the Scheldt and hence to the sea, so it was a new town, an artificial town, as proven by the square pattern of the streets.

Gillis Vresele, who stood with James van Artevelde, also knew the town. Gillis had travelled several times to Biervliet, not so much for the herrings the harbour brought to Ghent, as for its salt.

Salt was quite more expensive than herring, and the salt of Biervliet had a particularly fine taste, hence was sought after as a delicacy in Ghent and other towns of Flanders. It was worth its weight in gold in Ghent and Bruges and everywhere else, a fine product to trade in as long as one did not establish a monopoly, which Gillis Vresele avoided.

The men of Biervliet had developed a very special means of producing salt. They dug out of the fens tufts of earth called 'daric' or 'zelle', burned those to ashes and then rinsed the ashes with water from the Scheldt. This mixture was later boiled in large pans over peat fires, also dug out in the neighbourhood. Of peat the men of Biervliet had enough, like in Axel, where Gillis owned much peat land. During the boiling of the water, the salt gradually ascended to the surface as a thin layer, which later fell to the bottom of the pans as crystals. The salt was used to a great extent to salten and preserve the herrings, but Gillis bought each year a few wagon loads of this salt and had it then transported to Ghent and Sluis over the Scheldt in a ship of the de Hert family.

When James van Artevelde arrived at Biervliet, he stood with a few of his closest friends, looking at the behemoth of stone rising out of the landscape.

The men had ridden on horses, but left the animals with a guard among a small wood of birches, behind a hill. They had then climbed up the hill to look at the wide landscape and the walls of the city. They enjoyed a fine view from where they stood. They had awoken early, at the first light of dawn. All was peaceful. The tent camp of the army of Ghent, two miles inland, could not be seen from the town, but scouts on horse of Ghent rode in small groups of three or four men-at-arms around the town. This activity must have warned the townsmen and the *Leliaerts*. No sound but the happy chirping of a few small birds and the long, moaning cries of the gulls disturbed nature at the place where the men of Ghent stood, fists clenched in their sides.

James watched Gillis Vresele who was about of his own age and then he looked at the Vresele sons, Boudin and Jehan, both about twenty in age. John de Smet, a very successful goldsmith

had insisted to join the militia, despite the protests and wailing of his wife Marie Vresele, the daughter of Gillis. Even better friends of James were the weavers Raes van Lake the Younger and William van Lake, both around twenty-five but veterans of Cassel, where they had fought with John de Smet. John's sister Veerle had married William and Raes had married Mechtild, a sister of Gelnoot van Lens, who also joined the group. John de Hert had come too, the shipper's son who had married Beatrise, a van Vaerneuwijc girl. He was talking to Pieter Denout, the fuller, who was married to Kerstine, John de Hert's sister. Everybody harboured somewhere family relations to everybody else in Ghent, and James van Artevelde often discovered his friends were linked to each other in many ways. They were all business partners, engaged in trade secrets and in commercial agreements. James van Artevelde often traded together with the Vreseles, who had a special cunning, like himself, for sniffing up gold in trade of about everything. James sold cloth of and with the van Lakes. The Denouts worked much for the van Lakes, even though they fulled for several weavers. The de Herts transported their goods and as they all profited from their relations, they bought silver, gold and jewels from John de Smet, which they also sold in France and Brabant.

The militiamen and loyal knights of Ghent had arrived in the evening after two days of marching. The march had been uneventful, the weather fine and dry. This morning, the friends of van Artevelde had flocked to James, attracted to him like the bees to a hive, as they often assembled in Ghent. James could talk to them as if he were dialoguing with himself only.

'Biervliet is a formidable fortress indeed! Have a look at those high walls, the towers or barbicans that defend the walls from the side, the towers that form the gatehouses. The walls are surrounded by a large, deep moat fed by the sea. The only way to attack this town is by assaulting the gates, but the gates are perfect killing grounds! See how well they are defended from above and from the sides. We may tow our two rams to the gates, but crossbowmen will shoot from the towers right into our packed mass of men and make many victims, while the defenders can pour boiling oil down at the ram and at our warriors, and shoot arrows right down. How could we ever capture this fortress? We knew of this, of course. We knew there was a good reason why the Leliaerts of Ghent settled here instead of in any other place. We can also not starve them out, for they have access to the Scheldt to the north and hence to the sea. Ships will bring them food. They can have more victuals than we and last for years!'

The other captains joined van Artevelde.

'How many men did they really bring together inside the town?' Raes van Lake the Younger asked, hoping desperately on low numbers.

Gelnoot van Lens replied, 'about two hundred knights of Ghent, including their squires, including the sons and friends of the banished or fled men. These may have brought about the same number of knights and trained men-at-arms from the countryside north and east of Ghent. They may have four hundred knights in all, plus about two hundred men-at-arms they pay. From the town itself, maybe two hundred men more, less well trained, in less armour, but warriors nonetheless. We may have to face eight hundred men in arms, of which four hundred knights on destriers in heavy armour, four hundred more men on foot and in mail coats, maybe wearing breastplates and greaves, all helmeted. I doubt they could have found more than one hundred crossbowmen, these men from Biervliet. I wonder just how loyal the militia of Biervliet are to the *Leliaert* knights. My gut feeling is the original inhabitants have been forced to grab arms by the *Leliaerts*, and I guess these men will not fight hard, may even turn against the lords when these seem to be losing the field.'

'How many men have we brought?'

‘About six thousand,’ James van Artevelde answered that question reassuringly, ‘but how could even twenty thousand men get into that fortress? Only a few tens of men can attack the gatehouses together; the rest of our army will stand watching. Maybe our siege engines can breach the gates, but that may take eternity and our engines are old. Our catapults may break before any gate is destroyed. Our rams are Methuselahs too, but ramming the gates will make many, many dead and wounded. We could fill the moat with earth, maybe near a gate, and use scaling ladders on the walls, but that may well flood more land around the walls than we like. We have a real issue here!’

‘We have no option but to attack the gates,’ Gelnoot van Lens resumed, ‘there is no other alternative. I propose we attack two gates at the same time. I would also show only half of our army at first. Maybe that scares Biervliet into surrender or into talks. The other half we must keep in reserve, hidden, behind the hills, in case they sally.’

‘Why would they sally?’ James van Artevelde wondered pessimistically. ‘They must know by now how many men we brought.’

‘Not necessarily,’ Peter van den Hovene objected. ‘We have seen scouts when we began to leave Ghent, but not thereafter. They are aware we have come with an army, but they can only guess with how many troops we came.’

‘Well then,’ James van Artevelde concluded, ‘there is no need to make matters more complex than they are. Here is the plan. We leave one half of our army, three thousand men, at our present camp. William van Huse and William van Vaernewijc can lead these, have them advance to a mile from here in total silence, to behind the woods, here. The three thousand others we split in three battles of a thousand men each. One group under Gelnoot van Lens attacks the western gate, the gate to Bruges. The other group attacks the eastern gate to Assenede. That group will be led by Peter van den Hovene. We do not attack the south gate to Eeklo, for that one looks the strongest to me. I’ll place a thousand more warriors in the centre and storm to the first gate that falls. We attack each gate for about three hours, of which the first hour for the siege engines that work from a distance. We’ll probably not get in after two hours of fighting, but if there is a good chance we can breach at one of the two gates after that time, you continue trying. If you got nowhere after two hours, you withdraw. My group shall not participate in the attack on the gates, serve as reserves and to guard the central gate in case the knights sally. Three groups of one thousand men each, approximately. Do you have any remarks?’

The captains did not utter a word. They kept staring at the gates, frowning and looking very dubious. They looked in awe at the high walls. Little was to be seen of the defenders, but that could be a ruse. Few men in arms showed their heads from behind the crenellations, and then only the stave and bow of a crossbow was seen, but the captains were certain hundreds of eyes followed their every movement.

After a few moments still, the captains ran to their men. Only James van Artevelde and Gillis Vresele stood on the small hill, lingering in front of the town.

‘You know,’ Gillis Vresele suddenly said, ‘the men inside that town are knights, men trained to fight on horses and armoured with plate. They are proud men, arrogant men, men who believe they are worth ten of us. We are merely the drabble of Ghent for them. How must they feel, trapped inside a small fortress, even if it is a town? Do you think they will like walking up and down the stairs to the embattlements dressed in full armour? I suspect they hate fighting on foot. Also, with eight hundred men and five hundred horses or so in that confined space, that place must stink worse than a dung-heap after two days. How well will the inhabitants like that? The horses’ urine must flow like a stream in the streets! They must dab in horseshit when they walk!’

James van Artevelde grinned, 'you have a particular way of explaining things, Gillis, but you are right. Now, tell me what you really meant to say!'

'So,' Gillis continued his reasoning, 'I would bet a hundred pounds those knights are going to sally from out of their rat-hole. If you show our three thousand men, the *Leliaerts* might sally. Three chances out of four they'll sally! What do you think?'

James van Artevelde gauged the walls again.

'You may be right, three chances out of four,' he replied, 'and I sure hope so. It would be very stupid of them, for I don't believe we can get inside those walls. But what you just said makes sense. We shall make our demonstration a bit longer than planned. I am tempted to show less men to the town, but then again, I would not show less men, for the knights will never believe we brought less than three thousand.'

'We need more *goedendags* and more pikes than swords, here,' Gillis Vresele continued. 'The men we mass first should have more *goedendags* and pikes to stop a charge of knights. We can get those from our reserves.'

'Fine,' James van Artevelde agreed calmly. 'I'm off to give the last orders!'

He went down the hill to join the troops of the parish of Saint John.

A short time before noon, the warriors of Ghent marched into the plains in front of Biervliet. They arrived in three waves.

First, the men from the parish of Saint John marched into the field, led by James van Artevelde. They marched smartly in tight ranks, about a thousand men, and positioned themselves to the central gate. Biervliet could hear the commands being shouted. The warriors stepped in silence to their places.

A little later appeared more men from the parish of Saint Michael under Gelnoot van Lens. They positioned their ranks in another battle of a thousand men to the west, to the left of James van Artevelde. These men came with the Ribalds of Ghent, who drew forward two catapults and a ram. The siege engines were held behind the lines, however.

The third battle was led by Peter van den Hovene, with the men from the parish of Saint Nicholas. Their Ribalds also drew a few siege engines of Ghent.

The army of Ghent thus displayed, stood and waited. A slight breeze coming from the sea made the hundreds of banners unfold and whirl. Would the *Leliaert* knights fight against their own banners? James van Artevelde felt a huge pride in his heart when he saw the myriad of colours of the army, although the brown and grey hues of the tunics, of the mail coats and of the weapons of the troops dominated. The militiamen of Ghent, and a few knights on horse stood around half the walls of Biervliet in silence. James van Artevelde forced his troops to wait in good order for over an hour. The two other captains paced up and down the front ranks of their men, now and then looking at James, expecting the order to attack, but James kept them waiting. James did not waver in his plan. He waited until his own patience had been entirely devoured by his passion to defeat the *Leliaerts*, the traitors of the town. He hated the knights more with the second, for they were men of Flanders and of Ghent, yet they would have the deaths of many of the good people of Ghent on their conscience. Finally, the waiting sapped James's calmness. He could wait no longer. He gave the signal for the attack on the gates.

James van Artevelde made one of this trumpeters call. Suddenly, all the drummers of the three battles and all the trumpets joined in. The men shouted their war cries and hit their shields with their weapons. The lack of any sound from the walls of Biervliet was eerie. James van

Artevelde wondered why so few men showed on the embattlements of the walls. Had most warriors of Biervliet fled the wrath of Ghent?

Then another sound was heard, a rolling thunder of hundreds of horses thumping the ground at the gallop. The noise grew, neared, and then hundreds of shining, armoured knights on caparisoned horses came in view of the *Gentenaars* from the north-east. The knights of Biervliet sallied! The mass of horse riders came in view. They made a splendid view! Each knight was in armour, each knight wore a multi-coloured surcoat over steel breastplates, showing his badge. Each horse head was covered with plate and a few horses wore steel horns as if they were unicorns. Armour hung also along their front muscles, hidden under trappings emblazoned with the badge of the rider. The colours of the battle that advanced towards the *Gentenaars* were a dazzling, splendid and menacing force. The knights rode already with closed visors, many of which wore pig snouts and bird beaks.

‘The damn bastards have dressed up!’ James van Artevelde cried.

Luckily, the militiamen of Ghent had not yet broken the ranks to run to the gates. The two other captains now retained their men and they waited for other orders that surely must come. Only, James van Artevelde had not agreed on other signals for more orders! He called Raes van Lake the Younger, Gillis Vresele and Pieter Denout to him.

‘Quick,’ he cried, ‘no discussions! Raes, my boy, run to Gelnoot. Tell him to place his battle to our left in ranks eight deep. Tell him to prepare the *goedendags* and the pikes to receive the horses. We do not attack the gates, we fight the sally!’

Raes ran off immediately. He had not more than a hundred and fifty yards to run, but timing was crucial, now.’

‘Pieter, you run to Peter van den Hovene. Tell him to position his forces to our right. We must form one wall to face the *Leliaerts*. He must retreat and step back to my right side, even if that movement may cost him men. Be quick! Have him prepare the front lines with *goedendags* to fend off the horses!’

James continued, ‘Gillis, shut up! I know you want to stay, but you can’t. I need you. You must find a horse in our lines. Tear down a knight if necessary. Go to the captains that wait, to the two Williams. Tell them to advance on the run from the east. I want them biting in the back of the *Leliaerts* as quickly as possible. Tell them to hurry, but to only attack when they can come in at the backs of these bastards! I want to crush them between two anvils!’

Gillis did not protest, though he was disappointed. He had wanted to fight and protect his son and his friends. There was no time for remarks, however. He ran to behind the lines.

James van Artevelde, the captain-in-chief, was certain he would never have the time for the manoeuvre of pivoting his troops in one continuous row, but also the knights in front of him needed time to form their battle. The knights had emerged from a large gate to the north side. They arrived in the plains south of Biervliet in one elongated column, whereas they had to face the *Gentenaars* perpendicularly to where they arrived from. Their ranks thickened gradually, then lengthened before James’s central battle. James succeeded in turning his men to have them in line with his person, facing the knights. He received enough time for Gelnoot van Lens’ men to position to his left. Peter van den Hovene’s warriors were not attacked immediately. Peter could place them to the right of James van Artevelde, which happened in some chaos for they had to run backward and they looked anxiously behind them all the time. From left to right stood the men from the parishes of Saint Michael, Saint John and Saint Nicholas. Gillis Vresele would bring the militia from the parishes of Saint James and of Saint Peter, to which had been added the men from outside the *kuipe*.

The *Leliaert* knights assembled their troops at ease, convinced of victory. James van Artevelde noticed with some awe that most of their men rode on horseback, whereas his militiamen would fight on foot. Not more than a hundred knights had remained loyal to the aldermen of Ghent. These stood behind James's battle of armed guildsmen. He ordered the first three rows to prepare their *goedendags*, and that took some more time, for men carrying *goedendags* had to come forward and the men armed with swords, axes, maces and morningstars had to step behind. The three captains thus built up their defences with a wall of shields and steel points. The *Gentenaars* prepared for the shock.

The knights of Biervliet and their men-at-arms took all their time to prepare. They formed a splendid lot, all dressed in shining metal, long lances now held low to the ground. They sat comfortably on caparisoned horses, many of which wore long trappings. Surcoats and trappings showed the badges of the finer houses of Ghent embroidered on linen. James missed the crossbowmen in the front lines. He surmised most of those men of Biervliet had remained on the embattlements of the town, and that was good, for the crossbows could hurt his army badly. A large group of men on foot stood behind the enemy battle. The knights had the intention to launch an assault themselves, and only afterwards have the killing be finished totally by their footmen.

James faced about six hundred knights, more than he had feared, and somewhat over two hundred men on foot. The six hundred knights clearly wanted to smash through his centre and through parts of his left and right wings. They would be received on a porcupine of steel.

The single battle of the enemy suddenly advanced. The scene and the noise of the advancing horses was terrifying. Had the knights wanted to scare the guildsmen by their mass of lances and horses? The single, massed battle of knights advanced in very close order, lances couched horizontally. The militiamen of Ghent saw a multitude of very bright colours and hundreds of long lances directed at their breasts. How could they stop the energy of the galloping destriers and the dangerous, vengeful monsters of steel seated higher? Many a militiaman whispered a last prayer. The priests that had come to the battle signed a cross. The men in the front ranks of the guildsmen dedicated their souls to God, for they did not expect to live.

The knights drove their fierce destriers into a canter and when the mass was only a hundred and fifty yards from the rows of Ghent, into a gallop. The knights shouted war cries, their armour clang, the hooves of the horses shook the ground. Their war shrieks thundered over the heads of the militiamen.

The Flemish *Leliaert* knights of Ghent threw all their weight of metal into the guildsmen of Ghent who knelt, crouched behind their *goedendags*, one end of their weapons firmly stuck into the earth to absorb the shock.

The clash of the two armies was terrible. The first four rows in the centre of the guildsmen of James van Artevelde were thrown down and trampled upon. The horse riders stopped only well within the sixth row. They were stopped there, their impetus spent. Most of the riders had lost their lances by then, stuck through the bodies of brave militiamen who had not wavered, or lost in the shock, broken to pieces when they stuck into the ground. The first rows of the guildsmen had been transformed into an incredible chaos of fallen horses, tumbling knights and killed guildsmen. The *goedendag* wall did not exist anymore, but had done its work. Horses whinnied painfully, horses cried out in pain, horses fled wildly, prancing, with *goedendags* still in their flesh, and many a horse had in falling crushed guildsmen.

When their horses were made to stop inside the rows of steel, the knights dropped lances and took to swords, battle-axes and maces. A dogged fight ensued. The knights were trapped in the army of guildsmen, but they wreaked havoc in the ranks. The knights knocked voids around them, slaying all guildsmen who dared to approach them. The militiamen massed together, they hindered each other, and seemed at a loss on how to confront the mad masters of hard metal that killed them too easily.

The help came, strangely, from the very first rows the knights had overrun. Many militiamen had been killed in the rows, but many more had only been thrown backward. They rose now with vengeful eyes, maddened to rage, standing often five to one, amidst the biting horses. The knights there had too many warriors on foot around them to beat them all off. When they slew a guildsman to the left, a courageous man on their right ducked under their horse and slit the belly of their animal. *Goedendags* stuck ugly in the sides of the horses, and more often than not these had pierced the greaves of the knights. Horses continued to fall. The whinnying and neighing and screaming in death was awful to hear. The centre of the guildsmen stank of blood and of sweat. Knights fell, legs trapped under the mass of disembowelled horses. Some fell over the animals in wide arches, and not all could get up quickly enough to escape from a sword slashing at their throat, from an axe cleaving their breastplate. Swords were stuck through the slits of the visors of the helmets into eyes and brains. Blood sprouted from the heads, necks, legs of the knights, and a knight severely wounded was a dead man. The guildsmen used the back points of their *goedendags* to thrust deadly, rusty iron spikes with superhuman force through breastplates from very close by.

The disciplined, massive attack of the *Leliaert* knights, the army of the count, launched with pride and confidence, had been brought to a standstill before the knights had been able to breach all eight ranks of the men of Saint John, allowing more men of the ranks to close in on them, engaging the *Leliaerts* in a terrible slaughter from which the horse riders could not any longer flee.

James van Artevelde stepped with Boudin Vresele and me, Jehan Terhagen, at his left side, William van Lake and John de Smet to his right, into the mêlée. He wielded a battle-axe he had found on the ground, finding that weapon more efficient than any other. He swung the axe in a circle and wounded or maimed any enemy horse that came near him. He slashed wide at the legs of a fine, black destrier. He saw the horse neigh and slowly, slowly fall sideways, throwing the knight out of the saddle. The knight fell hard to the other side, so he had the time to rise, but James van Artevelde arrived a second earlier. James parried a mighty blow of a lead-studded mace on his axe, felt the steel of his weapon quiver, feared losing it, but he held on and backslashed again at the knight. The man of steel caught the axe on his mace and drew the axe to the ground. James stood helpless.

Boudin Vresele stuck his *goedendag* in the side of the knight and held on, pushing and pushing with all his weight on the weapon. The knight cried out. Blood sprouted along Boudin's weapon, onto his arms, and while the knight hesitated and was paralysed by the pain. I swung with my *goedendag* in such a forceful way that the head of the knight was thrown sideways. The man's vizored helmet was drawn from his head, and already I hefted my weapon and swung it anew to cut at the man's neck. I reached the neck, and drew the point in. The knight hurled his mace sideways in almost a full circle around him, hitting powerfully both Boudin's and my shield. In the opening of the man's defences, James van Artevelde cut his axe deep in the knight's side, right under his breastplate, cutting through mail and reaching the man's belly. Warm blood rushed down the knight's legs, sprung on van Artevelde's surcoat and coloured it red. Blood also sprouted now high, out of the man's neck, out of the terrible wound I had inflicted on the man. The knight wavered, did not have the

power anymore to wield his weapon anymore. I proved to be a magician with my long, old, rusty *goedendag*, piercing the dying man's gullet. I was covered in blood, but I stung deep. The knight sank to his knees, then he toppled over. Such was my first encounter with horror in a battle for Ghent! I remember it was crucial to switch off one's emotions while in battle and simply continue stabbing and slicing, without thinking at all about the men one slew. In a battle, one had to shed off one's humanity!

Boudin Vresele stepped forward and engaged another knight, followed by William van Lake and John de Hert. William parried a murderous slash of a heavy blade with his shield, while Boudin and I pushed our *goedendags* forward with all our power, into the horse and into the knight. The man slashed out at Boudin surprisingly agile and quick, so that Boudin received a nasty slice in his side. I could parry most of the power of that sword, but I could not avoid Boudin being wounded. I thrust my *goedendag* at the knight, who deviated my anger with his shield, opening his protection, and then I stabbed again and again, until he fell, covered with blood.

James van Artevelde had to know how the battle raged. He saw how a few enemy riders had totally pierced his lines, but there they now fought against the loyal knights of Ghent. The enemy riders wreaked death in the last ranks, attacking James's men fiercely from the rear. James though he remarked desperation however, in the faces of the knights who had pushed their visor up for better visibility. Elsewhere, from the first to the rear ranks, a terrible massacre of knights and militiamen in close combat was being waged, knights and guildsmen fighting and killing each other. The guildsmen gave no mercy anymore. They had seen too many of their comrades die.

James craned his neck. Fewer knights of Biervliet had reached far into the ranks of Saint Michael and Saint John on the left. The men of Saint Nicholas on his right held their lines. The din of the battle was deafening. The warriors still launched their war cries. Steel clank on steel, prancing horses whinnied, the wounded cried out, orders were shouted by the leaders of men, drums still beat and trumpets sounded shrill and high. The ground stank of horse sweat, of hot blood, of urine and faeces, as some of the less courageous men had emptied their bowels under their mail coats or even, for the knights, in their armour. To James's left and right, the ranks of Saint Michael and Saint Nicholas closed in with overwhelming numbers on the front knights.

James van Artevelde felt exhilarated then, sure of victory. I saw his confidence grow! His centre group barely held their positions, might even have been passed over at places, but his left and right wings ran to where they were needed. James swung his axe like a madman, reaching horse and knight. He swung, hit, advanced, swung, hit and stepped on, forward, into the fiercest fight, followed by his young guards. He was covered in blood by then, but continued to wield his weapon with an energy and force that was not of this world. He fought in a frenzy, and no sword or mace could hurt him. He parried and swung. The *Leliaert* knights made many victims, inflicted ugly wounds on the guildsmen, but they were inexorably being slaughtered, killed mercilessly in large numbers, caught in a mass of vindictive militiamen. James van Artevelde held his centre together, losing men but holding the core of his army closed. The guildsmen here remarked they were alone in their struggle, but they did not yield. They had seen so many of their friends and neighbours fall, killed or maimed by *Gentenaars* they had remarked before, walking haughtily in the same marketplaces of their town, that their hearts and minds were filled with hatred and the need for revenge. Then, to left and right, the men of Saint Michael and Saint Nicholas sprang into the mêlée with fresh energy,

falling on the knights as a stream of devastation. The *Leliaerts* were being killed mercilessly in large numbers.

James stopped a few moments, emerging out of this madness, looking at the battle that raged around him as if he were a bystander. Knights still had advanced far into the rows of James's men of Saint John. James looked behind him. Boudin Vresele sat on his knees, holding a hand to his side from where blood drooped steadily. His hand was soaked in blood. James cursed. He had sent Gillis Vresele, Boudin's father, to the reserve half of the army. He could not allow Boudin to be hurt more. Gillis would not forgive him. James also saw now how John de Smet, wounded at a leg, stood in front of Boudin, holding his hand to a wound and thrusting his *goedendag* still at a knight on foot. Two other guildsmen engaged the knight. William van Lake was fighting to James's right.

James van Artevelde came to his senses. He ran to the left of Boudin, who seemed to waver and be falling down, unconscious of what might be happening around him. James grabbed a lance, dropped his axe, and while he stepped forward, he drove the long lance of a fallen knight deep, very deep in the side of another steel monster that had wanted to hack at John de Smet's head.

'Take that, bastard,' James van Artevelde called with a strong, hoarse, dry voice to the rider, so that the surprised man turned, only to better see at the shaft that had entered deep in his flesh. The knight fell from the horse, dropped to the ground, but James did not bother with him, for other *Gentenaars* drove the long points of their *goedendags* into the warrior's neck and legs, I among those men. I stepped to Boudin Vresele and stood to protect the boy I considered my brother. William van Lake ran to us. William had always bindings of white silk on him. He knelt to Boudin and bound the wound tightly.

James van Artevelde took up his axe again and turned the weapon to make place for me around Boudin Vresele. Then John de Smet and William van Lake also stood next to James to protect Boudin. Where was Pieter Denout? A few paces forward, Pieter was parrying frantic sword slashes from a knight who wore breastplates decorated with gold thread. Around the knight, three corpses of killed militiamen spilled their last blood red. The knight made his horse prance, bite and snarl at men of Saint John who attacked him on the other side of Pieter. This knight fought bravely and fiercely, with very efficient movements of his sword, displaying an energy unmatched around James van Artevelde. Two more militiamen sprung to the man, fearless, into his sword slashing, threatening to maim the knight's horse. The knight forced his animal backward while fending off these guildsmen. He managed to hurt a guildsmen badly, and then he was gobbled up by the front ranks, where more knights continued to fight. This was not a place of cowards, but no warrior thought of bravery or cowardice in this battle. This was not a place to think. Friend and enemy just fought on till the end. Nobody, whether brave or weak, hesitated in the battle. One had to kill or to wound to survive.

The knights of Biervliet might have thought for a few moments they were winning the battle in our centre, but the centre held. A few knights rode back to the front, to gallop once more into the ranks of the men of Saint John with a hard impact. The knights had drawn open spaces into the rows of the men on foot. They formed wedges now of from five to ten riders, entering deadly into the massed guildsmen. Then, James, still defending Boudin Vresele, saw a more terrible development.

The two hundred or so footmen of Biervliet entered the fray! Together with the knights, they formed an irresistible force that cruelly attempted breaking the ranks and the spirit of the militiamen.

The men of Saint John could not hold this pressure. We died and stepped back. We yielded terrain. Then however, yet more men from our left and right wing spilled over the centre, helping to form a more dense, thicker struggle of men, in which the footmen of Biervliet might be choked. The knights could not breach the thicker rows of men.

At that moment also, new trumpets sounded, other drums rolled their tunes, and James van Artevelde saw his grandiose reserve of three thousand fresh men come running in from the east, flying banners high, to overwhelm the enemy. When the knights became aware of this large, new wave of troops that ran into them, they seemed to stop their fighting for a few seconds. They resumed their horrible work, but they retreated slowly towards the water circle around the town of Biervliet and towards the central gate. That gate was still closed, but when a fairly large groups of knights reached it, the gate opened. Knight after knight rode into town, abandoning the battle!

James van Artevelde shouted, ‘after them, after them! Let them not close those gates! After them! Into town!’

To James’s satisfaction, some of the most courageous and battle-maddened guildsmen ran between the horses into town. As more riders passed the gate, so did more militiamen ran on foot through the gaping opening.

The knights who still fought us in the battlefield broke. They abandoned their footmen to fight the guildsmen and be massacred, whereas they fled the battle in mass. Other knights rode to other directions, away from the town. The new army’s horse riders pursued the knights of Biervliet here and there, but some riders outrun them. In the meantime, hundreds of militiamen flowed into Biervliet and secured the gatehouse. The enemy had made a crucial error. The defenders of Biervliet had let James van Artevelde’s army into their town at the same time as their *Leliaert* knights. On the battlefield, the struggle in the rows of guildsmen ended. Enemy on foot thrown down their weapons and surrendered in great numbers. Scores of guildsmen hasted into the town.

Gillis Vresele had arrived with the reserves. He sighed. Biervliet, gentle, beautiful, bucolic Biervliet would be ravaged. No captain could now hold back the guildsmen of Ghent. The town’s women would be raped, the men murdered. James van Artevelde had given orders to spare the town, but the captains and troop leaders could not retain their men from committing the worst crimes in this first frenzy of the capture of the proud city.

Deep inside the centre of Saint John, Pieter Denout and John de Smet took at each side the arms of Boudin Vresele. With William van Lake, they slowly limped to the tent camp in the rear, in search of a doctor. James van Artevelde had ordered them to the tents. Many more wounded men returned to the tents in the same way.

James van Artevelde stood alone among the dead men, among the corpses of the horribly slaughtered horses of the battlefield. The fight had been hard, horrible, short and deadly. He cursed, but glorified in his victory. I saw him stand without moving, arms wide open, a battle-axe now once more in one hand and shield in the other, directing his eyes in triumph to the heavens.

While Boudin Vresele was being led off, James van Artevelde lingered in the battlefield. The battle was not yet entirely over. It raged on inside Biervliet and skirmishes were still being

fought between small groups of horse riders in the far. James looked around him. He remarked in a haze the hundreds of dead men soaked with blood, lying in the plains. He looked incredibly at the maimed horses that certainly would die soon, emptied of their blood. Horses convulsed around him, moving desperately their heads, screaming in pain. Other horses still stood, limped to here and there, trampling upon corpses of men, staggering and then falling.

The insects of early spring arrived and settled in the blood. Gulls amassed over the victims as a strange silence now hung. The horses and the wounded men cried out their agony. Stray horses began to run wildly at the sound of a gull's screams, among the dead men and the blood. Dogs arrived to sniffle and tear at raw flesh. Then, the black crows hovered above the fields. James van Artevelde saw all these images as separate, until he placed them together and realised only now the horror of the battle. James stood, covered in blood, rivulets of blood on his face, not his own blood, but the blood of other *Gentenaars*, though enemies of his cause. The stubbles of a rough beard of several days darkened his face.

Gillis Vresele came running to James, wondering where his son and friends might be. He stopped abruptly in front of James van Artevelde when he saw how battle-shocked his friend was. Gillis saw a madman, not unlike the many other madmen that were ravaging Biervliet, men unable to think. Gillis saw a man spattered with human blood, blood and sweat in his long hair and beard, hair matted with blood, a bloodied axe and shield still tightly in clenched fists. Gillis saw that man suddenly roaring to the sky like a lion that has killed, opening his arms to the heavens. It was a raw cry of victory, the release of the tension of the heart and the soul.

Gillis thought, very much surprised, 'my God, he loved it! He loved the fighting, the killing, the violence, the winning over others by sheer physical power. He loved being the victor over other men. My God, what have we created? Was he always so reluctant to seek power because he feared the power might change him so much, inducing him into loving the power, and using it without ever stopping? How many talents has this man hidden in his soul and how can we use them and bridle them at the same time? How can he dominate himself? How is the power and the attention of Ghent going to change his character? We have not taken such issues into consideration! We thought he would always remain the same person we knew.' Gillis thought he too was now battle-shocked, so he went to James, tore and pushed at his shoulders, hoping to draw his friend out of the mad frenzy. Slowly, the cruelty left James's wild eyes. Gillis asked where his son was. I, Jehan Terhagen, witnessed all this in silence, too tired to utter a word, my *goedendag* resting on the earth. The two men remained oblivious of me.

'Boudin? Boudin?' James replied. 'Boudin was hurt but he lives. I fought next to him, Gillis! I fought with the boys! I did not leave them on their own! I can fight in a real battle! The boys are fine, excellent warriors, all of them. They have taken Boudin to the tents, to a doctor. He has received a sword slice in his side, but stitching him up and cauterising will suffice to close his wound. He'll survive! They limped off. If you run, you will catch them. Take a horse. Many horses around!'

Gillis Vresele held on to James, shook him to his senses, and then James had to explain in more detail what had happened to Boudin. Gillis ran to the tents. He grabbed a knight's horse that seemed unwounded, and rode it in a canter to the tent camp, avoiding trampling the dead men.

A little later, the other captains assembled around their leader. James asked his colleagues to enter the town and stop the massacre inside. He ordered the captains to return as many men as possible to the tent camp, but to guard the city. He wanted to leave this hell of a place and return to Ghent, but he also couldn't accept the *Leliaerts* to come back in a few days and re-occupy the town. He would have to keep the army quite a few weeks still at Biervliet and pursue the fleeing knights to where he could annihilate them. The captains ran to the fortified town.

Jacob called all the leaders of his army to him. He dispatched orders to assemble the dead, to count them and bury them decently. He ordered his riders into pursuing the *Leliaert* knights as far as they could. He sent men to the tent camp to fetch chariots and transport the wounded to the tents. He kept me at his side as a messenger to help him in ordering his men about.

Completion

Boudin Vresele was attended to with rough care in the huge tent camp of Ghent at Biervliet. His wound ached painfully. It kept him in constant pain for another week. The wound healed well but slowly, and did not fester with pus. Gillis Vresele talked to James van Artevelde, asking him for permission to bring his son and the friends of his son back to Ghent before the entire army returned homeward. James agreed to that, provided Gillis led a caravan of few wagons loaded with other wounded men. One of the doctors would accompany the wagons to Ghent. James van Artevelde provided Gillis with an escort of twenty men-at-arms on horseback. James resented for a while his friend and best counsellor wanting to leave him alone in the field, but he understood Gillis's first duty was to his son. So we rode back to Ghent, glad to leave a place of death where the people of our town had tried to annihilate each other.

The militiamen who stayed at Biervliet sent out groups of loyal knights and men-at-arms on horseback to track the *Leliaert* knights of Biervliet who might have remained roaming in the environs. The villages around Biervliet had to be searched for fugitives. James van Artevelde did not want to hand Biervliet over, back to the *Leliaert* knights.

After a few days of relative leisure for the army of Ghent, on the twenty-sixth of April, a guard of Bruges rode on the gallop into the camp of the army of Ghent. The messenger was covered with sweat and dust. He asked for James van Artevelde. The man had ridden from Bruges in one stretch without eating or resting. His horse was half dead when he arrived at Biervliet. When he was brought to James van Artevelde, who was scouting Biervliet on horseback, the messenger told James and the surprised captains of Ghent that Count Louis of Nevers had left his castle of Male with a strong contingent of troops to take possession of Bruges. The count had probably hoped the army of Ghent would have a hard time fighting the *Leliaerts* of Biervliet, so that Bruges would have remained quiet and undefended. Of course, there were *Leliaert* knights inside the city who sided with the count. Knowing the guildsmen of Ghent engaged far from their base, the count and his men, led by the knight Morel de Fiennes, had entered the gates of Bruges the previous day, and planted their banners in the town market place, in front of the belfry. Heavy fighting was now going on in the city, the messenger told, for the fullers of Bruges had revolted almost instantaneously. The fullers had run to arms and attacked the men of the count. Bruges asked desperately for reinforcements of

Ghent to march on Bruges. The messenger could not tell who was winning in Bruges, for the fighting had continued throughout the night and the messenger had ridden out of Bruges in the early morning, sent by the aldermen.

James van Artevelde immediately prepared five hundred riders, some of whom rode horses recuperated in the battlefield, and he set off for Bruges that same evening. He asked William van Vaerneuwijc to prepare an additional one thousand men on foot. These would march on Bruges the next day. Peter van den Hovene would hold in readiness another two thousand men to march when notified.

When the horsemen of Ghent entered with bouncing hearts the city of Bruges, they heard from the guards at the gates that the battle for the city was already over. Count Louis de Nevers and Morel de Fiennes had not brought more than a few hundred men-at-arms, and these had been overcome and defeated in the night by the fullers of Bruges, to whom the other artisans had joined later on. Bruges was in uproar, the city in revolt against its count. The fullers had suffered a few dead, but the count had fled cowardly from Bruges, and ridden back to his castle of Male. The men of Bruges had refrained from pursuing him.

James van Artevelde brought his warriors of Ghent to the marketplace of Bruges, also to in front of the belfry, all banners flying, his men riding in fine disciplined columns, proud and smiling, to be welcomed in the streets by the guildsmen of Bruges who cheered them and greeted them. The aldermen of Bruges ran to James van Artevelde and opened their arms.

James van Artevelde shouted, ‘friends of Bruges, we have come on your invitation to help you defend the towns of Flanders! We want you to guard your liberties and crafts! We mean no harm, if your city is free we shall return soon to Ghent. We heard at the gates the brave guildsmen of Bruges have chased the count’s men on the run! We, on our side, have defeated the *Leliaerts* of Ghent at Biervliet! We have come to your help because we also need your help.’

The aldermen of Bruges received James van Artevelde in triumph, worthy of a liberator, even though the town had repelled the count’s men on its own. They had remained in fear of the return of the count with more warriors. The aldermen organised a meeting, and the same day a defensive alliance between Bruges and Ghent was signed and proclaimed. The aldermen and James van Artevelde decided together to hold a larger assembly in the monastery of Eeckhout with representatives of the three largest cities of Flanders, Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, and also with the *Brugse Vrije*, the castellanies of the countryside around Bruges. This assembly was to take place as soon as possible. The representatives of the other towns were called to Bruges in a hurry by fast messengers. James stayed a while inside the walls of Bruges with his men, to make sure the count could not return.

Two days later, James van Artevelde could address the representatives of the three Flemish cities in the grand hall of the Augustinian abbey of Eeckhout, situated near the centre of Bruges.

‘Honourable representatives of the cities of Bruges, Ieper and Ghent, and representatives of the *Brugse Vrije*, I greet you! We have assembled to discuss the events of the conflict we have with the count and the king. Count Louis has tried to capture Bruges by treachery and thus violated the freedoms of the town. As you may have heard, the army of Ghent has routed an insurrection of knights gathered at Biervliet, a revolt staged against the lawfully elected aldermen of Ghent. Our guildsmen militia are eliminating the last groups of men who remained so loyal to the king of France as to want Ghent to continue starving. These actions

were directed against our charters of freedom. We are free cities! Free cities in a county of the kingdom of France, but in a battered county. We cannot allow our freedoms to be trampled upon any longer! We cannot allow Flanders to suffer from the lack of wool on the whim of men who do not care for Flanders, so that our guildsmen went out of work and had to starve. Famine once more is harrowing Flanders. We cannot accept part of the people living in Flanders to want to perpetrate such infamy! What have the count and king accomplished to ensure the welfare of their citizens, as chivalrous ideals proclaim? The count of Flanders forced his entry into Bruges to start taking away our freedoms by arms, and he and the king must certainly have encouraged the knights of Ghent to revolt.

It has therefore become absolutely vital and necessary for the large cities of Flanders to tell the count and king they shall ensure the strict neutrality of Flanders in the conflict between the kings of France and England. The cities of Flanders must promise they do not refuse the feudatory obligations of the count to the king of France, but our cities need the finest wool and therefore, together, we must refuse to provide troops to defend or attack either the king of France or the king of England on any soil. We must be ready to defend that position with arms in hand, confident in our strength and with unfailing determination.

Yes, we shall defend our interests, the freedom of the people in our cities and our fundamental rights to exercise our crafts. *Vrijheid en nering*, remains our slogan more than ever. One city alone can never win from the great lords in that struggle, but the count and the king will never win from our three cities together giving them the same message! Let us therefore form an explicit alliance today, and actively seek the support of yet more cities of our county.

The message we should give to the count is one of peace. We want to remain neutral in the conflict between the kings, because we simply cannot do otherwise. We want that principle to be recognised and our freedoms guaranteed as before the ignominious treaties of Athys and Arques. My friends, these simple principles we must be willing to defend with our lives!’

The delegates applauded and an animated discussion began about whether or not the freedoms claimed meant disobedience to the liege lord, the count of Flanders. James van Artevelde argued the count should have to be made to understand the logical motives of the Flemish cities. When the count agreed with the cities, there would be no question anymore of obedience or disobedience. The delegates concluded they had a right to refuse to starve and die when one of their lords, count or king, told them to do so for their own interests only. The delegates affirmed the three towns should look to their interests and their freedom, if necessary guarantee these by arms. The alliance between the three cities would be written on parchment and signed by the aldermen. It was also decided to send a delegation to the count of Flanders in his castle of Male to explain this proclamation, to repeat and defend the agreement at the next parliament meeting of the county of Flanders at Oostkamp.

The charter of the treaty was prepared on parchment by the monks of Eeckhout and signed in the evening by the aldermen present at the conference. When the last men had signed, James van Artevelde walked to the market place of Bruges, accompanied by the delegates. A very enthusiastic populace greeted and acclaimed him. The guildsmen of the town, even the trade guilds, shouted their agreement with the alliance. The guilds of Bruges fraternised with van Artevelde’s men. James van Artevelde was called the saviour of Flanders, the wise man of Ghent, the liberator of the county and of the cities.

At the end of April, a large delegation from the three cities rode to the castle of Male. The men had sent messengers to the count, announcing their arrival, and they had received the news the count would welcome them. Louis of Nevers refused such a large group of about two hundred men to enter the castle, but he admitted a smaller delegation of a dozen men to

present their message to him. The representatives of the cities shouted for James van Artevelde to read their proclamation to the count. James would for the second time face Louis of Nevers, but this time he came as the absolute victor who could dictate his will in the county.

The aldermen of Bruges, Ieper and Ghent entered the magnificently decorated castle of Male, which was a residential castle, not really a fortress. It stood in the plains, did not seem to have high and strong walls, no towers as barbicans, no large moat. The castle had of course been built in the middle of Flanders, but the count could not feel safe here from internal revolts. Strong forces of knights and men-at-arms nevertheless defended the accesses. James van Artevelde stepped first over the bridge to the gate.

James remembered keenly how he had gone to the count for the first time in the Gravensteen of Ghent, afraid and nervous, feeling very small to meet such an important figure, feeling meek as a commoner standing in front of the highest noble authority in the land. This time, James held his head high, and he stepped on totally relaxed, walking swiftly, confidently through the corridor to the hall of Male. He arrogantly ignored the guards and the noblemen in the corridors.

Count Louis de Nevers sat on a splendidly carved, imposing wooden chair at the end of the hall. The count did not turn his back to James van Artevelde this time, and he remarked the self-assurance with which the captain-in-chief of Ghent stepped forward. James van Artevelde went on. He stopped only when he noticed a few courtiers bringing their hands to their sword. He held his fist also on his sword, then. He had not abandoned his weapon in the presence of the count, nobody had asked him to do so, and he would have haughtily refused to give up his weapon. It was cold in the hall, the fire in the hearth small, and Louis sat in heavy wool lined with ermine. The air felt humid. No doubt, the hall had been prepared and only a little warmed in a hurry.

The count spoke, ‘well, Mer van Artevelde, we meet again. What have you to say this time?’ James van Artevelde looked straight, insistently, challenging, at the count. He waited a few moments, opened his cloak, and took a scroll of parchment out of his clothes. He was very angry with the count. He had seen too many dead men at Biervliet and in Bruges. He imputed those victims to the count. He hated the man at that moment as his worst enemy. James said with a steady, loud voice so that everybody in the hall could hear him clearly, ‘lord count, the representatives of the three good cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper have met in the Eeckhout abbey of Bruges. They have decided for the text of the following treaty, which they have asked me to read to you.’

James then slowly read the words on the lines of the parchment. The alliance signed by the three cities ended with the words, ‘the delegates of the cities want their freedoms as agreed upon in their charters and as valid from before the Treaty of Athis and from before the Treaty of Arques to remain respected by the counts of Flanders. The cities have sworn fidelity and loyalty to the counts of Flanders, and they respect these vows, but they remark to the count they want their freedoms to be respected too, as well as the right to exercise their crafts. The alliance is signed by the aldermen representing the three cities and the *Vrije*. ‘

The count had been slightly bored while James van Artevelde read the long, pompous lines, and he had only frowned when James read of the active defence alliance between the three cities. He had been looking at his fingers as if the reading of the text did not interest him very much. He waited for a long time before reacting, so long a time James van Artevelde wanted to break the silence and turn on his heels, his message delivered.

Then, however, the count deigned to speak, 'I swear to uphold and to respect the freedoms of the cities, Mer van Artevelde, as I have done before. My oath cannot be challenged. Go and tell that, you representatives of our good cities, to your colleagues aldermen, captains and whoever. Nevertheless, I expect you to obey me as your lord! I and nobody else am the lord of Flanders! I shall never recognise a man above me in Flanders, except the king!'

The count made a long gesture of his hand. He thus dismissed James van Artevelde and the men of the cities who stood before him.

James van Artevelde insisted, 'would the lord count be willing to repeat that oath to the militia army of Ghent at Biervliet and at the coming parliament of Flanders at Oostkamp?'

Count Louis of Nevers looked back at van Artevelde, contemptuously, for he had understood the words as an order and as a threat. His first reaction was to sneer the representatives in his hall had no right to order him about. He wanted to clear the hall of this drabble!

He suppressed his first words just in time, however, and snapped, 'I am not going to Biervliet to your army, Mer van Artevelde, not to an army illegally assembled without the knowledge and agreement of your count! I rarely attend in person meetings of the parliament of Flanders. Nevertheless, my delegates will repeat my words.'

James van Artevelde had no intention to continue talking to the count. He bowed and left the hall of the castle, followed by the delegates of the cities. They went in silence, and also in the hall fell a silence until he had passed the open doors. Then, he heard shouts of indignation being released by the courtiers. His resolution did not waver. James grinned only, and he went back to the many men of the cities who waited outside. The delegates who had been inside with James, later explained in lively terms what had been shouted.

The delegates gathered at the gate of Male, discussed a short time, and then returned to Bruges.

Count Louis of Nevers did arrive a few days later in the army of Ghent at Biervliet. He rode into the camp on a fine palfrey, a fast horse, splendidly dressed, long trappings on his animal with the black rampant lion of Flanders embroidered on a yellow field. He was accompanied by twenty knights in full armour. They had sent a messenger a few hours in front of them to warn the captains of his arrival. Was this army not also the army of the count?

The militiamen brought the count to James van Artevelde's small tent. James stood on foot outside, dressed in mail and with a long sword at his side. His captains, all in mail hauberks and breastplates and greaves, dressed as for battle, stood behind him. Their scouts had spotted the group of riders long before, advancing on the north-east road to Assenede.

James van Artevelde was surprised, but he smiled. The count had wanted to show he, the count, was still the supreme leader of Flanders, also its military leader, and therefore the lord of van Artevelde and of the captains of Ghent. James van Artevelde did not mind the show, which was as thin as the first ice on the water of a pond. He, van Artevelde, commanded the army of Ghent, and the count knew that well enough. But appearances had to be respected. The count remained seated on his panting horse, 'I have come to see the army of my good town of Ghent, Captain van Artevelde, and to tell the men I never did anything else but respect their freedoms as defined in the charters of the town. Please call your men together. I shall address them!'

James van Artevelde and his captains grinned with incredulous faces.

‘How is it possible?’ James van Artevelde wondered, ‘that so much hypocrisy is displayed so candidly. This man and his king poked the *Leliaert* knights at Biervliet to action against their town, causing the death of many good men and causing Ghent to spend thousands of pounds. Yet, here, now, this man has come to tell our guildsmen he will respect our freedoms! I have a yearning to slay this man, here, but I cannot, for the whole of Flanders will rise against Ghent. Still, the oath should withhold the bad man from further negative actions against Ghent, until he has forgotten all about the oaths or until he will want to forget them and break them or find some excuse to bypass them. I must admit he has guts, after all. I represent a city that has sworn obeisance to him. I did not swear to him. Not personally but as a representative of Ghent I have to uphold the oaths. The game must be played to the end!’

James van Artevelde gave the orders to assemble the army, but he did not move one foot. The trumpets began to call shrill tones and the drums rolled, which made the count’s palfrey jump very nervously from one leg to the other, so that Louis de Nevers had to tug constantly at his reins. Van Artevelde heard the count curse.

In a few moments, the captains stood, positioned in front of the count, and three thousand warriors stood in neat columns, banners open and flapping in the wind, behind the five captains and their sergeants. The count could not but see he did not have a rubble before him, but the disciplined groups of trained warriors.

The count rode on his horse along the lines.

He returned, and then he cried in a strangely high-pitched but strong voice, ‘you have fought well, men of Ghent! I am your lord, the count of Flanders! I have come to promise you I uphold the freedoms of your town, as written in the charters on which we agreed and which you hold in the belfry, in honour of the good people of your city. I uphold your charters, as you will be my faithful subjects. Together, we shall ensure the freedom and integrity of the county of Flanders!’

William van Vaernewijc shouted, ‘Flanders! Ghent!’, and that cry was taken up and repeated by the thousands of warriors. Even James van Artevelde shouted that cry, which the count remarked, but nobody added the name of the count. Nevertheless, the shouts turned to cheers, and Count Louis de Nevers had won the day. William van Vaernewijc had also stopped the count from giving a longer speech than necessary.

‘How many of our men notice the absurdity and the hypocrisy?’ James asked to himself, but he got no reply.

Another voice inside him claimed, ‘have you not wished this? Have you not wished peace with the count, as long as your few simple principles were accepted? The freedom of the cities, their right on the exercise of their crafts and their rights on income are now guaranteed. There will be peace in Flanders. Is this not the end, the aim you have sought? You could step own now as head captain, and return to trading. Your job is finished! Rejoice and rest!’

Count Louis de Nevers did not stay with the captains. He left Biervliet immediately after his short address, without saying one more word to the captains and to van Artevelde. When the horsemen had taken the road of Assenede again, the captains disbanded the army and the men went back to their duty or to their tent.

Count Louis de Nevers, despite having said the contrary in Male, also did attend in person the conference in Oostkamp. He repeated the same oath. At Oostkamp, however, without ever explicitly recognising in one single phrase the alliance between the three largest cities, he

demanded the cities to repeat their oath of obeisance to him. He wanted this oath also to be taken by all the other cities of Flanders, so that the county would be reconciled with its lord. James van Artevelde was glad to re-install the peace within the county. He and the other delegates agreed to ensure the other towns of the county, not just the three largest ones, reconciled thus with their count.

James van Artevelde supposed then with satisfaction that the largest part of his aims had been reached: wool was returning to Ghent in large quantities, the freedoms of Ghent had been confirmed by the count, Flanders would remain neutral in the conflict between the kings, and the count has sworn to uphold this all for the peace in the county. What more could he have wished from the count? He might step down now from being the captain-in-chief of the city. Two reasons withheld him from doing so. He decided his task was not over yet.

First, he still had work to do, as promised, to reconcile all the cities of Flanders with the count. Second, he began to cherish the power he exercised over Ghent, so that he was reluctant to relinquish it.

‘I do not love so much the power,’ he thought, ‘as the affection of the *Gentenaars*. Am I not by far the most beloved man of Ghent? I cannot leave all that so soon!’

After the conference of Oostkamp, James van Artevelde returned to Biervliet. The *Leliaerts* had vanished from the face of the earth. Their cause was largely senseless now, since Ghent had reconciled with the count. The king was far, had not come to the aid of the knights. James van Artevelde took the army of Ghent back home, leaving a garrison of Ghent to guard it. At the head of the army, his army, James was received triumphantly in Ghent. The guildsmen marched in icy discipline to the *Kouter*, the military square of Ghent. Thousands of people cheered in the streets. Ghent had heard of the good news of the reconciliation with the count, the neutrality accepted, the old freedoms regained and debts to the count remitted. Peace had been restored. The people were satisfied in finding renewed safety. Even the staunchest supporters of the count among the aldermen applauded James van Artevelde as he marched on foot in front of the troops. The militia of Ghent were disbanded in the *Kouter*.

Immediately thereafter, as of the tenth of May, James van Artevelde, William van Vaernewijc as captains, the aldermen of Ghent with a delegation of aldermen of Bruges and Ieper, including men such as Henry Goethals, John Breydel, James de Schotelaere and Hugh van Lembeke, accompanied by envoys of Count Louis of Nevers, rode to many of the smaller cities, mostly situated in western Flanders, to urge them to renew the oath of fidelity to the count of Flanders. They thus visited towns such as Bailleul, Ninove, Duinkerken, Kortrijk and Roeselare. Ghent, Bruges and Ieper controlled vast territories, but not the towns of the regions that lay to the west, and nobody, not in the least the count, had forgotten that the last terrible revolt of Flanders that had cost the lives of many noblemen, the peasants’ revolt, had broken out in those parts of the county.

In the last week of May, Artevelde’s group also visited the towns in the territories of Flanders that were under feudal obligations to the German emperor, in the *Land van Waas*, the county of Aalst, and in the *Vier Ambachten*, the Four Crafts, the lands north of Flanders, west of the Scheldt.

On the eighth of that same month of May, King Edward III of England addressed a letter to the aldermen of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper. He assured them of his friendship, announcing to the three cities the departure of his ambassadors, the bishop of Lincoln and the earls of Northampton and Suffolk, to the continent. He proposed a conference in Antwerp. The

ambassadors of Edward III were to discuss a commercial and political alliance with the cities of Flanders.

James van Artevelde was occupied with his tour of the Flemish towns in that period of end May, so he did not accompany the delegation of Flanders to Antwerp. The delegates knew very well what kind of text they could negotiate with the English ambassadors.

James had also to make sure the king of France received the correct information concerning the agreement between the cities and the count, so Thomas van Vaerneuijck and John Utenhove, the two foremost knights of Ghent and loyal supporters of James van Artevelde, set off for France on the third of June.

King Philip VI of Valois welcomed the *Gentenaars* warmly at the court. He had by then fully understood it was harder to impose his will in Flanders than his counsellors had held in hope for him. The mood of the king was reconciliatory. He had heard, of course of the talks that were being organised in Antwerp with English ambassadors. If he wanted to keep Flanders at least partly in his grip, he could not alienate the cities much more at this moment. King Philip suspended the debts of the cities to him, as well as the debts of individual *poorters* of the cities. The king gave safe conducts to Thomas van Vaerneuijck, which stated that Flemish merchants should not anymore be seized in France. This would make an end to much contraband traffic between France and Flanders, so that the merchants of Ghent in particular could work in safety in the north of France and transport their goods over the Leie and the Scheldt far from and far into the north regions of France.

In that first week of June, James van Artevelde remained in Ghent. He had full confidence in what Thomas van Vaerneuijck would be negotiating in Paris, which was after all important in gaining King Philip's goodwill, even if the mission had only as its first aim to convey the announcement of the reconciliation of the cities with the count.

The conference in Antwerp was far more important, James evaluated. He had obtained that with the Flemish delegation rode Gillis Vresele and William van Lake. These rode several times to and fro between Ghent and Antwerp, to confer with James on the evolution of the talks. James's other confidant, James Masch, the main negotiator for Ghent, held regular council with Gillis and William. They decided together on which topics and when James van Artevelde should be kept abreast to give his opinion.

James Mash finally arrived in Ghent with a treaty the ambassadors had agreed upon. Masch read and explained the text to the captains and to the aldermen of Ghent. James van Artevelde expressed his satisfaction and gratitude to James Masch, and so did the other authorities of Ghent.

On the tenth of June of 1338, a mere five months after the beginning of the leadership of James van Artevelde in Ghent, the English ambassadors of King Edward and the delegates of Flanders signed a treaty by which the neutrality of Flanders was definitely recognised. Flanders would have the right, without causing the displeasure of the king of England, to refuse English and French men-at-arms in its territory. England recognised the feudal duties of the count of Flanders to his liege lord, the king of France, so that the count could respond to the call to arms issued by the king of France. The cities, however, would send no militiamen to either king. England would procure wool to Flanders. The Flemish merchants could not only buy wool at the staple of Dordrecht, they could do so in any town of England. Also, goods which held the seals of the Flemish cities, could circulate freely in England.

On the thirteenth of June, also King Philip VI signed a treaty with Flanders, which was brought back to Ghent in triumph by Thomas van Vaerneuijck on the twenty-first of June. The

king wrote he had heard the entreaties of his dear and faithful cousin, the count of Flanders, to understand the hardships the inhabitants of the towns of Flanders suffered from the dearth of merchandise. The citizens of Ghent had been struck with grief under the interdict. In view of these calamities, the king pardoned the misdeeds of the citizens of Flanders and willed also that they be absolved by the pope. The Flemish merchants were to enjoy free trade in France and English merchants were allowed to commerce freely in the county of Flanders. Enemies of France had to be resisted, but the king would not demand troops from the towns, unless the county was threatened. The count of Flanders had to provide his due feudal services, as well as the vassals of the count.

Thomas van Vaernewijc read this treaty solemnly to the delegates from the Flemish cities in conference in Ghent.

James van Artevelde arrived that evening in mid-June in his house of the *Kalanderberg* with copies of the three treaties in his hands, one with the king of England, one with the king of France, and one with the count of Flanders. In his hall sat the assembled Pharaïldis group, the men with whom he had decided to change the course of fate for Ghent.

At his table sat his wife, Catherine de Coster, Gillis and Boudin Vresele, Wouter and John de Smet, Raes van Lake the Elder with his sons Raes the Younger and William. Also present were John and Pieter Denout, the fullers, and the shippers Arnout and John de Hert. For the first time I, the young knight Jehan Terhagen, adopted by the Vresele family as their son, stood behind my friend and brother Boudin Vresele.

James read in total silence the three texts, in full. The men listened reverently. Then, we cheered and we filled our cups from the bottles of expensive sweet white wine Raes the Elder had brought. We all marvelled at how quickly and efficiently they had turned the hands of the aldermen of their city, of the count and of the two kings. We were fully aware of James's success. Although the authorities had graciously granted the liberties Ghent needed to regain its wealth and freedom to operate, they all stated this result had been obtained by showing the determination and the force of their city. The victory of Biervliet had been crucial.

‘Yes, the count and the kings confirm they have given us our freedom,’ James concluded, ‘but freedom is never given. Freedom has to be taken. We have demonstrated our power and forced the count and the kings to grant us our freedom. We have needed to prove our force with the arms. We had to show and use our swords to be feared. That must be our lesson. One only gets one's freedom when one is willing to fight for it and when the other side believes one is willing to do so to the very end!’

The Pharaïldis men were amazed at how powerful they were, how powerful their city was. Were they not the equals now of counts and kings?

‘What should we do next?’ Raes van Lake the Elder asked.

Nobody heard what he said, as the men cheered and clank the cups.

James van Artevelde had heard. He had a new plan ready, another dream. He would not stop, now! The taste of blood at Biervliet had given him a taste for power, the confidence he needed, and he intended to use that power for more.

Chapter 2. The Neutrality of Flanders. Summer 1338 – Spring 1340

Consolidation

On the twelfth of July of 1338, Edward III king of England, sailed with a large fleet of war cogs out of the Thames. He had received funds from the English parliament for an expedition in France. The funds were in the form of twenty thousand bales of wool. With him sailed his wife, Philippa of Hainault, for Edward wanted to consolidate his allies in the Low Countries north of France. He had to be particularly cautious with Hainault, for Count William of Hainault, his father-in-law, was also the brother-in-law of Philip of Valois by William's wife. Edward sailed with his peers, the earls of Derby, Warwick, Pembroke, Kent, Suffolk and Arundel. Also the knights Robert of Artois, who had fled France, Reginald of Cobham, Walter de Manny, and many other petty nobles accompanied him. These men were out for high rewards, for rich spoils of war and for ransoms on the noblemen they would make prisoners in skirmishes and battles. A week later, they lowered anchors in view of the harbour of Sluis, the first seaport of Bruges arriving from the Channel. Edward III did not disembark his men at Sluis, for according to recent treaties, the Flemish armies would have to resist him, tolerating no foreign troops on their territory. He did not want to alienate his allies.

When the news of a possible invasion by English troops reached Ghent, James van Artevelde conferred quickly with the two brothers Maes and William van Vaernewijc in the *Schepenhuis*. The one brother represented the civil authority of Ghent, the aldermen, and the other the captains of the town, the military leaders.

'The king of England cannot come on land with armed warriors,' Maes van Vaernewijc stated, worrying.

He feared James van Artevelde might allow the English army on Flemish soil. 'We have signed treaties in which is stated such an incursion is strictly forbidden by French and English alike!'

'I know and I agree,' James van Artevelde replied patiently. 'The treaties forbid King Edward to set foot on our land with armed men. Still, we cannot show up at Sluis with a large army, waving belligerently at the king with our *goedendags*, and shout at him to sail away or have his head bashed in! A little courteous behaviour might be welcomed.'

'We can call our militia together. He will get news of our mobilisation soon enough by his numerous spies, and back off!'

'No, no, no,' James hushed, shaking his head. 'I tell you there is no need for any sword-rattling! Edward knows the treaties as well as we do. He is merely testing our determination. Maybe the king wants to contact us, see who comes to him in the first place, who is willing to talk with him and how, as a friend or as an enemy. He is gauging how popular or unwelcome he is in Flanders. I have to go to him before other fools reach him, such as representatives of the count, and make it clear to Edward we stand behind our treaties, facing all the parties involved. We must honour him, flatter him a little, tell him how handsome he is, but remain firm.'

Maes van Vaernewijc nodded.

'If I go to the king, Maes, will the aldermen agree? I cannot call all the aldermen together for a decision, we have to be very quick. Can you explain to the aldermen and win them over?'

‘I believe I can do that, James. If I don’t succeed, we have a serious issue of credibility in Ghent, but I do not think that will happen. So, go, and tell the king you have come as the official delegate of Ghent.’

‘I won’t have to tell the king that,’ James said. ‘When I go on board his ship, he will assume I come as leader of Ghent. What if you don’t get the aldermen to agree?’

‘That won’t happen. I will throw all my weight in the issue. If it yet does happen, I’ll send an express courier to Sluis to warn you. William can serve as courier. But it won’t happen!’

‘Fine,’ William van Vaernewijc nodded too, ‘so we, the captains, do nothing for the moment.’

‘Exactly,’ James added. ‘Still, you talk to Maes and you decide with him on when you need to call the militia to arms. The king might force his army on land. Then, we must resist. I shall send a messenger to Ghent in that case. We have a few people of ours in Sluis!’

The men agreed.

James van Artevelde rode as fast as he could to Sluis. The authorities of Sluis and of Bruges, including the count’s bailiff, met briefly with him. The men appeared with pale faces and quivering voices. James spoke to two aldermen of Bruges who watched the English fleet with growing apprehension. He asked them as friendly and firmly as he could not to bring men-at-arms in view on the quays of the harbour. There was no need for panic. The two aldermen of Bruges were worried but they were courageous men. They had not over-reacted when the vast English fleet came in view of the port. James went with them to the harbour, and in the dazzling sun, on the silvery water, they saw the wonderful spectacle of a few hundreds of ships splendidly adorned in all colours, waiting in the harbour, still at sea, the *Thomas*, the royal war-cog in front.

James van Artevelde immediately asked for a barge to bring him to the fleet. Soon, he and the aldermen were being rowed in a small galley to the English fleet. Their boat showed the large standards of Bruges and of Flanders. When they reached the fleet, they had to ask twice where King Edward was. At last they bumped against the large war-cog the *Thomas*, painted recently in very bright colours with the triple lions of the royal badge, and asked for permission to come on board.

King Edward watched from the railing of his ship how James van Artevelde and the aldermen used roped ladders to climb to inside his cog. James was the first to jump on the deck. Archers pointed their arrows at him.

The king looked at the scene of the two finely dressed men who stood obviously in some fear on his deck and the tall man in a short brown tunic, leather belt, simple stockings and shoes, wearing only a long knife, who had come with them. He supposed rightly the man in the simplest of clothes but with the most energetic eyes to be the leader of Ghent, who also had obtained the support of the other cities. The cities came to talk to him, before the count of Flanders! That was good news, for the count was much his enemy, the cities more of his allies.

King Edward welcomed James van Artevelde unceremoniously on the deck of his ship, in the invigorating sea breeze of the summer morning. He put out a hand to van Artevelde when the men bowed and introduced themselves. The king’s right hand went to the hand of van Artevelde, but to his left came to rest on van Artevelde’s shoulder, and the king smiled amiably.

‘It is good to meet you in person, lords of Flanders! Welcome on board of the *Thomas*! Why don’t we talk further on deck? I find it a lot healthier here, in the first wind of the day, rather than inside my rooms. Arundel, can you have chairs to be placed on deck, please?’

The earl of Arundel went, ordering the seamen about. Chairs and a table were brought in a nick of time, beakers and wine.

James van Artevelde studied King Edward III. He was astonished at the figure of the king, deeply impressed by the man he saw. Edward III was very tall, a very powerful man in appearance, very knightly-like, handsome and elegant. The king was dressed in blue wool lined with gold thread, a tunic that came to his knees. Embroidered on the blue wool were the golden lions of England, and the tunic was held at the waist by a blue leather belt closed with golden clasps. Part of the king's chest was bare, open in a white shirt. He wore heavy necklaces of gold, dark blue silk stocking and shoes of blue leather with long tips. Edward was not dressed in mail. He was sailing on a war expedition, but he correctly did not expect to be assaulted here, in Bruges' harbour. When the king walked, paced on, he moved very elegantly. He pointed with a smile to the table and the wine beakers. His eyes and face smiled honestly at the men. James van Artevelde noticed his pointed, blond, yellowing beard and the king's long, drooping moustaches, a feature rather uncommon in Ghent. Then, James looked at the man's dark brown, intelligent eyes, thinned as of a sailor in a sun-tanned skin. The king's nose was hooked but strong. He had high cheekbones, his other features fine, a little angular, yet softened by the charming grin on his mouth and by the ease with which he moved around the Flemings.

'Women must fall rapidly for his power and charm,' James thought. 'How about his friendliness, his warmth, his cruelty, his willpower. What is he, a lecherous womaniser, a charming but superficial politician, a warrior, an astute intriguer, a man with a hang for pessimism or for optimism? What should I watch to be able to categorise and understand him? Is he dangerous, devious, or honest and straightforward? Is he a negative man or does he want the best for all of us? Should I like him or not? I didn't like Count Louis of Nevers on first sight. How about this king?'

The two aldermen of Bruges kept a stern face, but James had a long experience behind him in negotiating contracts. A smiling, open face and simple arguments most of the times led to quicker and better solutions. James grinned as broadly as the king. Even before Edward or one of his earls, Arundel and Warwick, had been able to grasp a beaker, James van Artevelde took one and handed it over to the king, who accepted, amused, and drank. Then also James took a beaker. The aldermen sipped with almost closed lips, but James and the king drank eagerly. Both were thirsty.

'Sourpusses, those two aldermen,' James thought.

He drank, cheering to the king. The king graciously forgave James's unceremonious manners. 'He is not very susceptible and not a stickler to protocol. Better not push him further,' James warned himself.

The king said, 'I am glad to meet you finally, Sir van Artevelde. Ghent has sent envoys a few times to our court, but I did not have the occasion yet to talk to the aldermen and the captains of your town, nor to get acquainted to you. I am impressed with the fine, wide harbour you have here. I have never seen so many merchant ships together. The bay protects the ships wonderfully!'

'And I have never seen such a mighty fleet as you have gathered, your highness,' James van Artevelde replied.

'You may call me my lord, Sir van Artevelde,' the king continued. 'This is not entirely my war fleet. I assembled a few ships, but not all.'

'What can we do to please you, my lord?' van Artevelde asked, almost offhandedly.

'I am on my way to Antwerp,' the king hastily answered. 'I wanted to meet a few representatives of the Flemish cities, and of course you in particular, Sir van Artevelde!'

The men spoke French as at any court of the continent, and Edward had used the French word of “Seigneur” to James.

‘I am but the military leader of the town of Ghent,’ James mentioned. ‘I am the captain-in-chief of Ghent. We can organise a conference and introduce our best families to you, my lord.’

‘That might be nice, but then I would have to disembark my men, and that would take quite a long time. Moreover, I do not think my army would be welcome on Flemish soil, wouldn’t it, Sir van Artevelde?’

‘Your lordship would be very welcome indeed, my lord, and we would provide you with an escort of many men to ensure your safety. Our treaties indeed do not allow foreign troops on Flemish land, as I am sure your lordship knows and understands. Please consider us as friends of England, however. We want to trade freely with England, augment our welfare by selling the cloth made from English wool to English people and in doing so fare better together. Our countries can surely profit from trade. We do owe feudal services to our liege lord, the king of France, so we desire to remain neutral in any conflict between England and France.’

‘I had hoped for warmer and more direct relationships, Sir van Artevelde! We need your advice on many matters. I would like an open mind for our issues.’

‘We grant that gladly, my lord,’ James replied.

James felt relaxed. The king obviously did not really thought it realistic to bring his men on land. The king would not violate recent treaties. He had maybe wanted to see Sluis by himself, gauge the grandeur of one of the greatest harbours in the world, see how the Flemish would react on his show of power, probably also take in provisions for his army, which van Artevelde knew was already being cared for by the aldermen of Sluis, and the king wanted to speak shortly to influential men of Flanders, not the count’s men.

James van Artevelde drank again, let a moment of silence pass.

Then he said politely, ‘we can organise a meeting between the lord king and the representatives of the cities, at Sluis or elsewhere in Flanders. We must, however, guard our newly defined neutrality.’

‘Meaning you don’t allow my men off my ships, here, of course!’

‘I am afraid so, my lord, but we would want you to be absolutely assured of our sympathy. May I also point out, as you surely know, I am not a noblemen in my country. You do me far too much honour but addressing me as ‘Sir’. I am merely want you might call by “master” or “Mer” in my own language. I am a commoner. I lead the army of Ghent, that is all.’

‘I know who you are and what you are, Sir van Artevelde. The habits of France are not mine. Nobody in my country who commands an army of how many, maybe ten thousand men, more than I could carry in any fleet, is a common man. Such a leader would always be addressed as “Sir” in England, and that is what I intend continue doing. We honour men like you, Sir James, at their true value. Men who have reached the highest functions in my land because of their personal capabilities are peers of England. The people in my kingdom are practical men and women, Sir van Artevelde. We appreciate and reward any man who contributes to the kingdom. We are too small in the face of our enemies to renege on talent, be it political or military. Tell me, how could we become allies with the cities of Flanders? I mean true and loyal allies, not merely friends, but true allies?’

‘The county of Flanders, my lord, was given in feudal loan by the king of France to Louis of Nevers. Count Louis is married to a French princess of royal blood. Our count was educated in France. He cannot and will not ignore or reject his feudal obligations. The count is our lord. An open, definite revolt of the cities of Flanders against our count is an act against the oaths of our aldermen, against our God-appointed lord. Flanders would be excommunicated and placed under the interdict by power given by the popes to the king in case of a revolt aimed at

our liege lord. We would be assaulted by the French feudal army, as we have been in the past. We have won battles in the past against France, and we have lost battles. We want to live in peace, to work and trade in freedom. No, we cannot now openly enter into an alliance with England, however much sympathy we have for you.'

'That is spoken like a trader, like a merchant,' King Edward hissed, slightly irritated.

'Which is what I am,' James retorted, almost whispering.

King Edward drank, looked again at Sluis in the far, seemed to reflect, looked at the gulls that soared and screamed overhead. James van Artevelde thought he had offended the king by his words. He cursed inwardly. He should have been more careful.

After a few moments, King Edward sighed. A smile once more formed on his thin lips.

'I understand your dilemma, Sir van Artevelde, and I sure would like to take the dilemma away from you. It must be a heavy burden. I like traders like you. Traders, I learnt, can also be subtle men, Sir James! I thank you for your frankness and for your logic. You might have given me vague, courteous, empty promises of which you and I would know they would never be fulfilled. Yes, I appreciate the honesty. The situation is simple.'

The king paused. He waited quite a while, looked at van Artevelde, then seemed to come to a difficult decision.

He said, 'I have a solution ready to your dilemma, nevertheless! You say you are bound by divine obligations to the king of France, but who is king of France? Philip of Valois is a usurper of the French throne, which lawfully belongs to me!'

'We, humble poorters of Ghent, cannot decide on who is the king of France, my lord. The peers of France and the Holy Pope can decide on such matters. Truly, if the throne of France is your rightful due, then God will grant you the throne, and we would obey the king of our countries loyally. I would very much welcome such a development, for it seems a high lord must care for his subjects' well-being and I believe Philip of Valois does not care much for the Flemish people.'

'It seems then, Sir van Artevelde, I shall have to take the crown of France by force, for the peers of France have chosen for Philip of Valois and the popes of Avignon are Frenchmen. You do not like your count and king much, I think. Would you be willing to help me?'

'I would, personally, my lord. The towns of Flanders, however, have proposed to remain neutral in this conflict. The cities of Flanders will hold on to the treaties concluded recently with yourself and with Philip of Valois. Please consider. We need grain, and our grain comes from France. Flanders buys wool from England because of the treaties, for the wool allows us to survive. But also, the wool bought financing for the English expeditions!'

King Edward grunted.

'Of course, of course,' he acknowledged. 'I am acutely aware of what the selling of bales of wool means to the kingdom and to me.'

King Edward took James van Artevelde once more by the shoulders, saying, 'look how beautiful the sea and the land are at this place, Sir James! They lie as wonderful as the curved back of a nude woman. Today, we can enjoy our wine and the view. I confess to you I have not just come to enjoy the landscape. These waters are infested by pirates, French pirates. I hoped to encounter a few and burn their ships. England is being harassed from out of these seas! The pirates have fled from my fleet, as they are lowly cowards. Tomorrow, I shall sail with my fleet to Antwerp. I need more allies in the Low Countries.'

After this conversation, King Edward and James van Artevelde, the earls of England and the aldermen, continued to chat about inconsequential matters. An hour later, James and the two slightly inebriated aldermen of Bruges left the king's ship, delighted with their visit.

James van Artevelde remained one more day at Sluis, to watch with his own eyes the English fleet majestically sail out of the bay of Sluis and the Zwin, into the estuary of the Scheldt, to Antwerp. Then he rode back to Ghent and reported to the aldermen King Edward had made a brief, courteous visit to Flanders. The king had not disembarked armed troops on Flemish soil, in accordance with the treaties. James could confirm King Edward respected the treaties he had concluded. James explained openly how much more agreeable, polite, concrete and honest his conversation with Edward had fared, in stark contrast with any conversation he, James, might have had with the count of Flanders. Eyebrows lifted in Ghent when James van Artevelde showed his sympathy for King Edward of England, but nobody dared to object at that time. The aldermen praised James for his successful embassy mission.

In the beginning of August, elections were held in Ghent for new aldermen. William van Artevelde, James's brother, was chosen as alderman, with the brewer Henry Goethals, the knight John van Steenbeke, James van der Hoyaen, Gerard de Neut, Lievin van Veurne, Baldwin ute Meran, John Rugginstul, and John Speliaert who became first alderman of the Law, plus others. Aldermen of the Estate were William de Meerseman, Zeger uten Dale, John Minneman, Simon de Necker, William Molenyser and others. Dean of the fullers then was John van Dessele, dean of the weavers John van der Vloet and dean of the lesser guilds William Yoons. Most of these men agreed with James van Artevelde's policy.

James van Artevelde silenced by arms and persuasion all opposition in the smaller cities around Ghent, thus enforcing his regime of neutrality. This meant sometimes exerting strenuous efforts to maintain order, for not everybody in the cities agreed with James's views. Not always did the captains he placed in these cities behave as he had wished. James for instance sent Ser John van Abbinsvoorde and Gerard Toen to Kortrijk to serve as captains and to have his policy be led in accordance to the treaties. Toen was a violent man and both captains were later accused of extortions. The ensuing disturbance in Kortrijk had to be quenched end September.

The count of Flanders also resented how Ghent took the ascendancy in Flanders, undermining his authority.

James van Artevelde effectively pacified the cities of Flanders to the new pact of neutrality and to the count of Flanders, Louis de Nevers, who had sworn to uphold the pact. James did the same with the lords of the castellanies of the countryside, preaching everywhere peace and reconciliation. Many aldermen and captains of Ghent were sent out with similar missions, and James reported a few times to the count in the castle of Male on how much progress had been made.

At one of these meetings, van Artevelde entered once more the count's hall. He had left about a dozen of his guards outside the castle. He was tired, for he had been on several missions up to the last days.

Count Louis de Nevers expected James van Artevelde that day. He sat on a large wooden chair in his hall, congregating with the noblemen of his court, wanting the courtiers to hear and to appraise what van Artevelde had to say, so that he could hear their advice afterwards. Van Artevelde was used by that time to the figure of the count. Louis de Nevers did not impress James anymore. James did not look at the magnificence of the great hall, nor did he give much attention to the gaudy courtiers.

It was the second of August of 1338. James wanted to deliver a short, oral report, and then leave the castle and ride as fast as he could back to Ghent. It would be one of the last times he would come to the castle to report, for he brought nothing an alderman could not inform the count in a short, matter-of-fact letter.

James stepped to the count, remarking a few knights of Ghent in the hall, people he had not expected to see so near the count and in the castle. James wondered why those people were present. Had they been called in to demonstrate to him, James, the count still had powerful following in Ghent? Did the Louis of Nevers try to impress him? Did the count want to show to the knights how the captain-in-chief of Ghent humbled himself before them? James felt the anger rise in his mind, but he bit on his lips and conjured himself to be brief and impassive.

James stopped before the count, bowed, and began to explain what kind of actions had been organised at which town and castellany, who had been delegated with how many men from the militia of the three main towns of Flanders.

James had not even finished speaking, when he heard hard laughing behind him.

He interrupted his report and instinctively turned to the hall, to hear somebody continue saying, quite loudly, ‘we have here a commoner wearing shoes with long tips, a tunic with long sleeves, in colours of a badge that has been drawn at the carnival of Lent. Do you think the man wears a long tail too?’

James van Artevelde saw a group of knights and landowner poorters of Ghent flocked together, mockingly laughing and grinning at him. James ignored the men. He wanted not to react to an insult thrown by a stupid man in a hostile environment. He wanted to finish his report with a few last sentences, and then leave. He then saw Count Louis grinning, a smirk on his face, laughing at the joke, not listening to his words. James’s anger flared.

He turned away from the count, stepped to the *Gentenaars* and shouted, ignoring he was surrounded by enemies and people who hated and envied him, ‘do you have anything to say to me directly, Ser Volker? Do you merely have the courage to say something behind my back?’

The man who had mocked James van Artevelde was Volker uten Rosen, a knight and weaver of Ghent. The man was a friend of James’s brother, and although apparently a *Leliaert*, usually kindly disposed towards the van Arteveldes. Volker uten Rosen was also a very impulsive man, who did not think much farther than his nose, always out to make himself heard loud-mouthed among his peers, a rather foolish, boastful braggart and a trouble-maker. Had Volker uten Rosen wanted to impress the count, to flatter him by mocking and insulting James?

Volker replied haughtily, ‘this hall is a place for knights, peasant! It is no place for commoners. Could Ghent not have sent a proper knight, an alderman of the fine lineages to report?’

‘Do you really intend to insult me, Ser Volker, or are you just as stupid as you look?’ van Artevelde wondered.

Volker uten Rosen’s right hand moved to his sword, but before the weapon had left one third of its scabbard, James van Artevelde had already drawn his own sword. He jumped aside and sliced a long, bloody wound the length of Volker’s chest. Despite the wound, uten Rosen thrust forward with his naked sword, but James continued the smooth impact line of his weapon and sliced downward, stepping yet more to uten Rosen’s side and sawing at the man’s throat.

Volker uten Rosen’s eyes showed surprise. His sword clattered to the ground, and James van Artevelde used the moment to thrust the point of his weapon in the man’s chest, placing all

his weight behind the thrust. Volker had worn no mail hauberk. Blood sprouted from Volker's throat and breast, and he began slowly to fall sideways.

The killing had happened so rapidly, been perpetrated with such quick and powerful energy, that the noblemen of the court stood with open mouth in silence, utterly surprised at the horror. The noblemen did not know James van Artevelde had taken lessons for years in sword-handling from the best swordsman of Ghent, an experienced warrior. Jacob had also fought at Biervliet!

James van Artevelde turned back to the count, bowed stiffly, judged the rest of his report was not needed anymore, turned again, showing the count his back, and he went to the doors of the hall. He had almost reached the panels when pandemonium broke loose. James heard outcries of anger and scandal. He feared being struck down from behind. He almost ran to safety, but the count must have given a sign to let him go unharmed, for he reached the doors. He drew the panels open, continued to walk, ran, and reached his horse and his companions. He shouted them to mount. They rode than as fast as they could from Male. Nobody followed them. James surmised he would not be welcome anymore at the court of Flanders for a long time to come, but he couldn't care less. Nobody would besmirch the honour of a van Artevelde and remain unpunished!

King Edward's Allies

King Edward III sailed out of the bay of Sluis on the twenty-first of July of 1338. He arrived in Antwerp two days later. His small army disembarked at Antwerp, and his fleet made its way back to England, strongly harassed by French ships.

Edward entered immediately in negotiations with his ally, John duke of Brabant. Duke John confirmed his friendship and his alliance with the king of England, but he politely refused to add his forces to those of the king in an assault on France.

Duke John argued Brabant was part of the Holy German Empire. A duke of Brabant could not act without the consent of the German emperor, not endanger the peace of the empire by war on another country. Nevertheless, he confirmed at the conference of Antwerp his alliance with England in a treaty, although it did not add much to previous vows. Delegates from the cities of Flanders, equally invited to Antwerp, repeated they held on to their precious neutrality and thus could not join their forces with the English army.

How well did Edward understand at that time his allies supported him merely with words, at great cost in coins to him and to the English kingdom?

During that same summer of 1338, King Philip of Valois fortified the city of Cambrai at which William d'Auxonne was bishop, as well as all the castles and strongholds on the confines of Hainault and Flanders. The king readied them to resist an onslaught of English troops. Then, he ordered his vassals to assemble at Amiens. He readied for war.

King Edward was much disappointed, the more so because the bales of wool he had expected to find waiting for him in the harbour of Antwerp, the wool that had to pay for his men, had not arrived. He had to move on, though. If his allies of Brabant referred to the German Empire before lending him assistance in his conflict with France, then he had to appeal to the emperor.

The Holy Emperor Lewis of Bavaria, holy though excommunicated in a conflict with the pope, was at that time at Coblenz on the confluence of the Rhine and the Mosel rivers. The German Empire had no crown domains and no hereditary succession system. The German emperor was elected. King Edward rode to Coblenz in the beginning of August, 1338. He found the imperial court in the old roman city. With the emperor sat a court constituted of the highest nobility of Germany, the electors, the archbishops of Mainz, Köln and Trier, the Count of the Palatinate of the Rhineland, the duke of Saxony, the margrave of Brandenburg, and others. King Edward spoke to the emperor and his court, day after day, and he painstakingly won the sympathy for his cause. He won the emperor by appealing on the man's hatred for Philip of Valois and for the French pope, and the support of the emperor's wife by his natural charm. He pleaded and begged.

Emperor Lewis did not really want to be bothered with what happened at the fringe of his vast empire. He wanted to get rid of King Edward, never to hear of him again. His counsellors proposed a drastic solution to that effect, which he told Edward. Emperor Lewis bestowed on King Edward the function of vicar-general of the empire for the lands outside Germany. The assignment as vicar-general was granted by the emperor and ratified by the archbishop of Trier in the name of the electors and peers of the empire.

As vicar, Edward had the right to act in the name of the emperor. He had the right to capture any city that had been torn away from the empire by France, and to take revenge for any insult or act detrimental to the empire. For instance, Edward could argue the castellannies of Lille, Douai and Béthune had been captured from the count of Flanders, who was at least in part also vassal of the emperor since the count held territories of Flanders for the emperor. As vicar, Edward had the right to demand assistance of the count of Flanders, since the count owed feudal duties to the emperor for the Land of Waas, the *Vier Ambachten*, the territories called the Four Crafts, and the Land of Aalst.

From Coblenz, Edward rode back to the Low Countries to savour his triumph. He rode to Herck in Limburg, where he set up court as Vicar. He called the lords of the Low Countries to him, to receive their homage. The assembly was held in a large building used as a granary. The hands of the duke of Brabant and of the counts of the neighbouring lands had been twisted to Edward's advantage. Edward tried to not smile too much when the lords bowed to him and awaited orders. They did not have to wait for long. Edward commanded them to assemble their armies for the next year 1339, and lay siege to the town and bishopric of Cambrai in the north of France, a town the king of France had illegally confiscated from the empire.

A few days only later, Edward ordered the lords to negotiate in his name with Philip of Valois as if he, Edward, was the lawful king of France.

Emperor Lewis of Bavaria also wrote letters to the cities of Flanders, announcing them King Edward had been appointed as vicar of the empire. The emperor congratulated the cities for the zeal, firmness and perseverance with which they fought against the people that were hostile to the empire. He promised them his support.

At that time, in September, the count of Guelders, also the brother-in-law of King Edward, arrived in Flanders to explain the rights of Edward as vicar. Edward could demand duties of the vassals of the emperor. The count of Flanders would have to provide military service to the emperor, that is to the vicar, or be forfeit of his feudal loans.

Edward then called all the vassals of the Low Countries together at Mechelen. The issues that concerned the Low Countries were discussed. The count of Guelders explained the emperor had taken notice that the count of Flanders had lost vast territories to the king of France, a loss

the emperor regretted. The emperor was willing to help Flanders recuperate Lille, Douai and Béthune. Since King Edward of England was the legitimate king of France, the count of Flanders was summoned to ask his fiefs from Edward.

The count of Guelders and the emperor ordered the cities of Flanders to examine in wisdom, in law and in justice to consider the situation and to advise their count with the view of recuperating the unlawfully appropriated lands.

The count of Guelders was authorised to grant advantages to Flanders. He could mint a coin equal in everything to the coinage of the Empire of Lewis of Bavaria. He could re-establish all the charters of the cities of Flanders, allowing the crafts to be exercised as the previous kings of France had ordained. Edward, king of France and England, could transfer the wool staple to Flanders and he could help Flanders in recuperating Lille, Douai and Béthune. All the judgements, punishments, payments of redemption money and other services illegally imposed on Flanders by Philip of Valois were to be abolished. The Empire and Edward would keep Flanders free from bandits and pillaging. The king of France, Edward, would nevermore conclude treaties without the agreement of the count of Flanders and the representatives of Flanders. Edward could grant to the county all the liberties that might be useful to Flanders and that he lawfully had a right to give.

The count of Guelders had already proposed to combine the wool staples of France and England into one, hoping to lure the Flemish cities to enthusiasm. The representatives of Flanders, however, held on obstinately to their policy of neutrality.

Edward called to the conference in Mechelen also the delegates of the cities of Flanders and delegates of the count. James van Artevelde participated in the talks with the delegates of Ghent. The representatives of the count agreed to lend military service to the emperor and hence to his Vicar-General for the lands the count held in feudal obligations to the emperor Lewis.

Princess Margaret of France

Count Louis of Nevers rode from the north of France back to his territories of Nevers and Rethel in eastern France. He had inherited the land of Rethel from his mother, who had been the countess of Rethel. Nevers, the *Nivernais*, and more, was the county he had inherited from his father and from his grand-mother Yolande, countess of Nevers. Nevers was the county he felt at home in. He was very much aware his forefathers had secured the county of Flanders for him, having resisted the pressure of the French kings who had sought to annex the very wealthy territories of Flanders to the royal crown. He was the descendant of noble and courageous counts of the north, the grandson of the famous and beloved Robert III of Béthune and the great-grandson of the no less formidable Guy I of Dampierre. He had read the chronicles of his family and listened to the stories his father and grandfather had told him. But how could he confront the king of France when the cities of Flanders refused him their means, worse, contested his authority? Was he not caught between two anvils, France and the cities, and had he not received most help from France?

He was a French potentate! The old, heroic stories of the Lion of Flanders had told of events that had happened many decades ago. He had sworn fealty to the French kings, and these oaths meant something to him. He would burn in hell if he reneged his oaths to France! Philip VI had crushed the army of Zannekin for him. He owed his county, his wealth to Philip of Valois! The king had been good to him, supported him, helped him, and protected him at

court. Moreover, his wife was Margaret of France, the royal daughter of King Philip V of France, and the mother of his son and heir, Louis of Male. His wife might inherit the counties of the Palatine Burgundy and Artois from her mother. She had brought wealth too, and might bring more! Louis had been French educated and loathed the coarse commoners of Flanders. He spoke French at his court, understood the language of Flanders only partly and then with great difficulty. He clung to Flanders because of its rich income, which surpassed many times the income from his French territories, but he did not love the land. Was he not one of the most splendid princes of France? When he entered the hall at court, the room silenced and all eyes turned to him. The ladies admired him, his splendid clothes and his wealth, his prestige.

Louis's liege lord was the king of France, but Louis might have challenged the power of the king, as his grandfather had, had he wished to do so and had Flanders done what Louis's right was to order it. He could bring as many men in the battlefield as the king of France, if only the cities yielded their militia to him! Why could Flanders not act as he wished the people of the county to do? Why did they try to contest his power over them? They had no right to do so!

Louis was a very pious man, interested, like the king, in the religious-philosophical disputes of the times. In fact, he wanted to be left in peace from the worries with Flanders! He didn't like and he didn't really understand how the constant strives between everybody in the lands of Flanders could go on for so long! He found the Flemish stupid, unworthy of his attention. He loathed their petty disputes, he wanted them to put their egoistic demands aside. They would be better off without the disputes!

Still, he relied on the lords and on the cities to provide him with guards, with warriors to enforce the peace, whereas the cities kept their militia to themselves, as a counter-force to his own, meagre resources of knights and their men-at-arms. He would gladly have waged war against the cities, but the power of the three largest cities united was too great for him, and the lords of the countryside had been decimated, their power broken by Zannekin and his revolt. He dared not alienate the cities too much either, for the cities contributed for the largest part to the income from his lands.

Louis de Nevers lived in great luxury, and so did his wife, a princess of France! He had been used to living this way. He held a magnificent court, possessed many castles and manors, hunted and offered fine golden jewels to his mistresses. He had it very difficult to accept that people from his lands dared to revolt against his God-granted rule. He considered it totally justified he was the only and supreme ruler over Flanders, by the grace of the king and of God almighty. He thought it very natural the richness of Flanders would concentrate to him, the count, whereas most of his people lived in abject poverty. He never thought it might be otherwise.

Louis was a very impulsive man. He acted out of awareness of his authority rather than by the knowledge of rational arguments. He did not really care for the well-being of the inhabitants of his counties. God had placed everybody where he or she belonged, hadn't he? The people of Nevers, Rethel and Flanders had to obey him, and that was that! The fact they didn't, was a nuisance, a crime, and a sin! Flanders did not belong to the Flemish, Flanders belonged to their count, and he, Louis, was their lord. He had the right to kick anybody he didn't like out of the county. That was his absolute prerogative! His greatest frustration was that matters stood slightly different, currently, in Flanders. In order to exercise his prerogatives, Louis needed power of arms, and at the moment, that power failed him. The Flemings merely accepted his moral authority. That other man, James van Artevelde, he wielded all the power!

Louis loved Nevers and Rethel because those lands were peaceful. The people complained little, worked hard, and the climate was far sweeter than in cold, humid Flanders. No wonder people in Flanders worked so hard: it rained far too much in that land!

The only issue he had when arriving in his castle of the Nivernais was that his wife, Margaret, was also present in the castle, and he feared his wife!

Louis was unpredictable and fickle in his decision-making, never sure of whether he was doing the right thing, usually confused over the arguments and the many sides to problems, but he was good at devising schemes and intrigues. He knew very well how to harass and keep harassing his opponents! He had learned that at the French court. He was also a very unscrupulous man, who felt no emotions for what happened to others. Margaret of France was his exact opposite except in this last feature of character. She was very intelligent, very rational, a fine manager of Louis's lands, a woman with an iron glove on her soft hand.

Louis arrived at Nevers in his castle, but he met his wife only in the evening. She had not bothered to welcome him. There was no love lost between them, except for their boy. Louis entered the main hall where Margaret used to sit in the evening with her ladies-in-waiting. She immediately dismissed her servants. Louis knew well what that meant: a row! Margaret would chide him and call him a liar and a coward.

For a welcome, Louis received, 'why have you come to Nevers, my dear Louis? Did you not have your hands full with the events in Flanders? What is happening in your county?'

Louis went up to Margaret, took her hand and kissed it.

He said, head high and nose lifted upwards, 'I wondered how you and my son were doing, dear Margaret!'

Margaret was six years younger than Louis, but even seated she looked twice as formidable in dignity as Louis.

She had been married to the sixteen-year old Louis as a child of not yet ten. Their son, who would inherit Flanders one day, had been born only ten years later. Margaret had refused to let Louis come near her before that time. She was thirty now, Louis thirty-six, and she was perfectly up to him in words and deeds. Louis didn't impress her.

'I am doing well, and so is young Louis, thank you,' Margaret replied curtly, adding not the usual 'my lord' to her answer. 'Your place is in Flanders!'

'It became too dangerous for a while in Flanders,' Louis confessed. 'It was necessary to leave the county for a while.'

'Oh, the powerful, richest count of Flanders had to flee! For what and for who did you have to flee?'

'I left the country on my own initiative,' Louis retorted. 'The Flemish will learn the hard way what it means to have no lord in their lands for a while. They will revert to chaos and anarchy soon enough! They will crawl on their knees, begging me to come back!'

'Will they now? What if they don't crawl, Louis? What if they like it you're not in the county? Why don't you call your lords and their warriors to you, hire mercenaries and do away with the hotheads? They must have leaders! Have I not heard of a certain van Artevelde? You could crush the ones who defy you once and for all, and then you will have fifty-odd years of peace and quiet! Teach those commoners of Bruges and of Ghent what a lord can do! Burn a few houses, tear a few charters up, and kill a few hundred men. Take from them what is yours by right!'

'I'm afraid that won't help, my dear. I may get a few thousand warriors from my lords in Flanders, and I could hire a few thousand mercenaries at tremendous cost, but you don't know the power of the cities in my county! That man, van Artevelde, has united the cities. They

stand against me. The cities can easily bring twenty thousand or thirty thousand militiamen in the field against me! Their men are trained for war with all sorts of weapons. Their crossbowmen from the city guilds release their bows faster and they shoot with more accuracy than the Genoese bowmen I might hire. Moreover, our finances are low again. We need the money from the cities to uphold this fine castle, and that money will keep floating in as long as I do not attack the cities, me in Flanders or not! The flow of money will be stopped when I attack Bruges or Ghent. It is better to wait some and watch what happens.'

'They take half a finger now, an arm tomorrow,' Margaret insisted. 'Who leads them this time? This man van Artevelde? Are you once more expecting the king of France to fight for you, to succour you?'

'No, no, that won't be necessary. King Philip also is low on money. He will not bother with me or with Flanders. I don't want the king to destroy Flanders. It would sound like killing a source of wealth. It would not be very smart to do that!'

'What are you going to do then?'

'The issue will blow over, it will go away with time,' Louis hushed.

'No, it will not,' Margaret snorted. 'It will get worse if you don't do anything against the power of the cities.'

'I told you there was nothing I could do!'

'There is always something to do! Do you really think you can remain sitting here in Nevers, hunting agreeably and boasting to your mistresses, hoping the issue will solve itself? Dear Holy Mary and Joseph! You truly are a coward! How do you think the king and the other princes will react when you cannot get a grip on the cities? Sooner or later they will crush the cities, and you with it. They cannot afford their power to be contested! Neither can you! This is a wolves' world, Louis. They say wolves don't eat wolves, but that is simply not true with kings and princes. They will never forgive you. They will despise you, think you are weak, know you are weak, and take your lands away from you. Are you a wolf or a lamb? Damn you, Louis!'

'And what then should I do?'

'The Flemish always quarrel among each other. I have learned to know them! One city quarrels with the other over this or that, the knights quarrel with the guildsmen in the cities, the guilds quarrel among each other. If there is something Flanders does well, it is quarrelling! Support the quarrelling! In every dispute, choose a party. Choose the weakest party and tell that party it would win the dispute with the help of the count. There are all the time uprisings in Flanders. You should have your say and imply yourself in every uprising, give men and funds to the knights, help the smaller cities that contest the supremacy of the largest cities with advice and arms and funds. Support the fullers against the weavers, the shippers against the traders, the weavers against the hostellers, the traders against the aldermen. When all is quiet, sow unrest by spreading rumours. When there is unrest, intervene to bring the peace and show only you, the count, have enough authority to quench disputes. Undermine the authority of that man Artevelde, if necessary have him killed by hired mercenaries. There is so much you can do! Harass that devilish brood so much that in the end they see no way out but to appeal to you. Don't tell me you have not thought of all that yourself! Don't tell me you have done nothing, don't tell me you gave up already! Are you so stupid, so lazy, so blind, and so cowardly of nature? Must I whip you back to Flanders? You are a disgrace to your forefathers and the worst example I can think of for my son. You can stay a few days here, in my castle, Louis, but I shall whip you out of here and I want you far closer to Flanders soon! Don't disgrace yourself at the court of Philip of Valois by sulking in a corner or by begging at

court! Show you are a man, however hard that may feel to you. I want you out of here and working at Flanders!’

Louis had paled while Margaret scolded him. He thought she was being unfair. He had tried several initiatives. She didn’t realise how hard and dangerous Flanders could be! He would have to return to closer to Flanders, he knew that too. Where could he go to? He could occupy one of his castles on the border, or buy a hotel in Lille, Douai or Amiens. It would cost him time and money to build a network of informants in the large cities. He could use the *Leliaerts* for that aim and foment revolts by them. How tedious this all was! At least, he would not be constantly insulted by a woman such as Margaret!

Margaret felt he was thinking of his supporters in Flanders.

‘You can use the *Leliaerts* to foment disputes and cause uprisings. The *Leliaerts* may not like you because you have abandoned them to their fate too often. They will support the crown, and I am a princess of royal blood. They will support me. The wealthy traders won’t support you because you have debased the silver coins too often. No wonder they want to link Flemish coinage to Brabant or even English coinage. Still, you can tempt them with special privileges on free trade.’

‘All right,’ he said at last, ‘I shall return to near Flanders, soon. I will not come back to here. Insult who you want! I take my leave, my lady.’

Count Louis strode out of the hall, called the ladies-in-waiting back in, and gave orders to his stewards to prepare to travel out the next morning. He would have to see his son this same evening. His homecoming had been bitter!

The treacherous Count

The conference of Mechelen summoned the count of Flanders to lend assistance to King Edward, but this did not in the least deter the count from intriguing against his cities in order to submit them to his will! King Edward resided in Brabant, but without a considerable army, and his ships had returned to England. He had disbanded his troops around fifteen September of 1338, while still in Brabant. Count Louis of Nevers continued working in secret against the cities, which he intended to punish in the late winter of 1338, before the cities could expect help from England.

The count’s *Leliaerts* surreptitiously occupied the towns of Lille, Douai and Saint-Omer. He had the *Leliaerts* and the knights of the countryside rally to his intentions. He restored to the knights the rights they had obtained long ago from the counts of Flanders.

In January, the *Leliaerts* first captured the town of Bergues in the south of Flanders, and they killed many persons who had shown sympathy for the cause of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper. The same force of knights then threatened Diksmuide. The count of Flanders moved out of Tournai to join these forces. Together, *Leliaerts* and count aimed an attack at Bruges. The militia of that town was at that time laying siege to the castle of Liedekerke, which was defended by another group of *Leliaerts*.

By twelve February, the men of Bruges heard of the intentions of their count. Led by their Mayor Giles of Coudenbroeck and by their captain John de Cockelaere, they marched on twenty-three February to Diksmuide to surprise the *Leliaerts* and the count in their sleep. Louis of Nevers had to flee in the middle of the night, break through the gates of the town the

men of Diksmuide had closed, and ride as fast as he could with his *Leliaerts* to safety. He rode to Saint-Omer.

In the spring of 1339, the news of what the count had tried treacherously to accomplish became known in Ghent. James van Artevelde assembled the militia of Ghent and moved southward, leading them to Ieper. He was accompanied by two grandchildren of the former count and Lion of Flanders, Robert of Béthune, by Henry and Guy of Flanders. In mid-March, fearing new uprisings of the *Leliaerts*, he ordered Biervliet to raze its walls entirely, and so was done under the supervision of Captain Peter van den Hovene. James consolidated his authority further during the summer, in the county and in the towns.

The danger of the troops of the count had been effectively repelled. The cities of Flanders were outraged by such unlawfulness of the count. Whatever Louis of Nevers had solemnly promised, sworn and written, he had not one moment deviated from his plans to re-assert his power over the cities.

James van Artevelde shouted to the delegates, the aldermen of the cities, that proof had now been given plainly of the untrustworthiness of the count of Flanders.

The cities wrote to King Philip of Valois, protesting against the asylum given to their enemies in France. With bitterness, they demanded the restitution of Lille and Douai. They sent delegates with these requests to the king.

Philip of Valois received the delegates with a broad smile and honeyed words, hushing in reconciliation, but inwardly cursing because the Flemish cities had once more defeated the count and the *Leliaerts* he had secretly supported. He dared not, however, at this moment, risk the neutrality of the cities. Philip feared more than ever Ghent, Bruges and Ieper would help King Edward with their militiamen in a campaign launched from out of Flanders into France.

King Edward, in the meantime, exercised more patience. He had assembled an army during the summer of 1339, an army that had been brought from England to Antwerp, but that also consisted of men brought by the duke of Brabant and by German nobles. He waited at Vilvoorde to launch an attack on the king of France with some of these, his own troops, and with the troops of his allies. He waited until the end of the summer of 1339, marching southward with the armies of Brabant and the German counties. He marched with about fifteen thousand warriors, a considerable army. Edward reached Laon, marching slowly through the Picardy and Thiérache regions in the north of France, devastating everything in his wake. Maybe he wanted to impress the French king with how much damage he could cause to the land, but the means he used had been applied also during his Scottish wars. He reached Flamengerie.

A formidable French army faced him there. King Edward formed three battles. He stood in front with his English men-at-arms on foot, flanked left and right with archers. Behind him, in another battle-line, stood the German nobles and their men. Still farther waited the duke of Brabant with warriors from Brabant and Flanders.

King Philip VI arrived with an army of more than thirty thousand men, mostly knights on horseback, the traditional army of feudal France, but King Philip of Valois thought it too late in the year for a battle and for a campaign. He withdrew his forces, demonstrating how fickle he could be in war. Edward III, racked by worries over funding, equally withdrew. The king of England was extremely short of money at that moment. He had already pawned the crown of England, now he had to pawn the crown made for his coronation as king of France!

The militia of Flanders had meanwhile gathered between Deinze and Menen, directing their attention to Lille, Douai and Béthune, ready to capture these in case Philip of Valois did not satisfy their demands, and in support of King Edward.

Count Louis and King Philip feared much the intervention of the militia. So, while King Edward's campaign was in full advance, Count Louis of Nevers suddenly arrived at Kortrijk, inviting the representatives of the cities to meet with him on the twenty-first of October. Louis of Nevers announced to the cities the king of France had accepted their demands. James van Artevelde and many delegates from the towns sat in conference with the count, but they heard no firm statements. After a few days, having learned King Edward had withdrawn his troops into the county of Hainault, Count Louis abruptly abandoned the conference, without having arrived at conclusions.

James van Artevelde understood the Flemish cities had been tricked into inaction, whereas the French lords of the borderlands of Flanders continued ravaging and pillaging Flemish villages of the regions of Tournai and Cambrai. He swore never to be cheated again by Louis of Nevers.

Back in Ghent, in his house of the *Kalanderberg*, James sat one evening at his table, looking at his treaties. The one of ten June of 1338 with King Edward stipulated that if the king of England broke his engagements, the Flemish towns would assist the king of France, Philip, in the conflict. The same principle should be applied to Philip VI!

'Our treaties with Philip of Valois are not worth a penny,' Raes van Lake shouted with bitterness in James's hall.

'And neither are our agreements with Count Louis of Nevers,' John Denout added. 'We surmised the party was over when we had our treaties written and signed, but the treaties are not worth the price of the parchment they have been written on. Why should we then honour the treaties of Athis and Arques when count and king do not respect their sworn word?'

'They are clearly treacherous, untrustworthy, lying, thieving lords,' Gillis Vresele added. 'The only promises and oaths they will follow are the ones exerted by the might of the sword or the *goedendag*, preferably by the sword at their gullet, and then only for the duration of our sword at that place. We thought we had won peace, but we have nothing but vain words of men who believe the only action that counts is the pursuit of their own interests, whatever they have said, signed on silk or parchment, promised, or sworn earlier.'

'You are so right,' James van Artevelde sighed. 'Once more I have been naïve. In the future, each time Louis and Philip want something from us, we will push their noses into their lack of trustworthiness. I consider only King Edward a trustworthy man. He is ruthless, but honest. He has always been favourable to the development of our cloth industry. That is of course also in his interest, but when I met him I saw in his eyes he could be relied upon. He is a man of his word. He keeps promises and oaths.'

'If we don't obey Philip of Valois, we will have to bend our heads again under the papal interdict,' Arnout de Hert warned.

'No, not really,' Gillis Vresele corrected. 'We run the risk of the interdict if we disobey to the king of France. Who is the king of France? If Edward is indeed trustworthy, we have much to gain, peace, freedom, crafts, by considering Edward as our feudal overlord. We should recognise Edward officially as the successor of Saint Louis, as king of France. Edward only seems dignified for such a holy and venerable function. We have nothing to gain but pain and misery from Philip of Valois and Louis of Nevers. How about urging Edward to pursue his

claim and supporting him openly in his war with Philip of Valois? Count Louis under King Edward will be mauled!’

‘That would mean refuting our neutrality,’ James van Artevelde remarked, ‘and for many people in Ghent and in Flanders such an overt declaration would be a step too far today. What do they know about all the deceit of Count Louis of Nevers behind the screens of suavity he displays? Nevertheless, you are right, of course. What we can do, without openly declaring us, is to encourage Edward to claim the throne of France, as Robert of Artois seems to be aiming at since already a long time. Robert has made the English peers around King Edward swear loyalty to that aim, the so-called Oath of the Heron! In all logic, Edward will ask for our militia to help him in a war campaign against France. That may lurk in the future, and when the appeal comes, we may still consider how to react. In the meantime, we would be giving him and Philip a clear sign our patience is exasperated. King Edward is in Brussels. I’ll ride to Brussels and expose to the king what we discussed.’

The men of the Pharaïldis group nodded in agreement, but their hearts felt heavy.

In the next days, James van Artevelde had the same kind of discussion with the aldermen of Ghent. Even the staunchest supporters of Philip of Valois, the *Leliaerts* among the aldermen, uttered no objections against what the captain of the city proposed. James once more accompanied delegates from the cities to Brussels, to recognise Edward as the rightful king of France.

As expected, Edward answered bitterly he could hardly claim being king of France when he had not captured the least city of the kingdom. The delegates understood the hint, and bowed their heads in shame. Nevertheless, James van Artevelde urged the king to remain in the Low Countries. He invited Edward to visit Ghent and to talk with the aldermen, presenting his views. James proposed for Edward to forge stronger links also with the count of Flanders, however difficult, and learnt that Edward had something similar in mind.

What Edward did not tell, was that he knew every promise would cost him enormous amounts of money, for only with money could he buy promises and oaths, and funding was what he lacked cruelly at that moment. Edward found the men of the Low Countries were better businessmen and extortioners of money than loyal warriors!

King Edward III arrived a few days later in Ghent, at the beginning of cold November of 1339, but he returned by the twelfth of November to Antwerp for a conference with his allies of Brabant, Hainault, Guelders and Jülich. Edward delegated his ambassadors William of Montague, Henry Ferrers, Godfrey Scrop and Maurice of Berkeley for negotiations with Count Louis of Nevers on view of a marriage between the count’s son, Louis of Male, so called because the boy had been born in the castle of Male, with the king’s daughter Isabella. The English ambassadors could negotiate with the count on terms to confirm in the king’s name the liberties and privileges Flanders had enjoyed under the count’s forefathers, and even to accord him and the county new liberties. The ambassadors could also promise to give back to Flanders all the castles, towns and lands Flanders had once possessed. They felt empowered, as representatives of the true king of France, Edward, to promise the annulment of the excommunications and interdicts pronounced over Flanders in the name of the pope by the unlawful king of France, Philip. Edward III empowered his ambassadors to receive, if not the straightforward homage of the Flemish cities as lawful king of France, at least a declaration in favour of the lawfulness of his own claim.

King Edward then returned to Ghent.

The English king was lodged in the rooms of the abbey of Saint Bavo of Ghent. He talked almost daily with the delegates from the three largest cities of Flanders. James van Artevelde brought to him the aldermen of Ghent. The charm of the king did wonders. James also presented his counsellors, the Pharaïldis men, to the king, and so I too met the king of England, which I considered a very great honour. The enchanted Ghent offered lavish banquets.

The representatives of the Flemish cities and of England discussed about no less than three new, far-reaching treaties.

By the first agreement, the king of England promised to protect the ships of the Flemish merchants. This point was much appreciated in Flanders because more and more French ships attacked at sea the merchant ships of Flanders.

The commercial contracts concluded in Flanders, wearing the seals of the cities, were to be valid in England.

The wool staple, the official depot of English wool, the place where the quality of the wool was controlled and counted by English royal servants, would be established in Flanders or in Brabant.

Edward III promised not to sign any treaty with Philip of Valois without the common agreement of Flanders, count and cities. Edward would come to the aid of the cities when their freedoms and charters were in peril. For this point, Edward bound his lawful successors to the throne. He also promised huge sums of money to Flanders for the support of the cities, money he did not have.

In the second treaty, the concrete fulfilment of the first, the king of England ordered this navy to protect effectively the ships of foreign merchants. To that aim, two thirds of the seamen on board the royal navy would be hired in Flanders and Brabant, but fully paid by the king. For a period of fifteen years, the wool staple would be held in Bruges. Edward would pay one hundred and forty thousand pounds sterling to the Flemish cities. James van Artevelde had by then more or less an idea of the king's finances, and he wondered how Edward would pay his debts.

In a third treaty, the terms and conditions of the old treaties that might have threatened Flanders by the interdict and by excommunication were declared totally void.

Edward III, as king of France, granted satisfaction to the Flemish cities for all the grievances they had brought forward since a century.

The towns and castellanies of Lille, Douai, Béthune and Orchies were to be retroceded to Flanders, never again to be separated from the county. The county of Artois and the city of Tournai would be joined to Flanders.

The privileges the cities had obtained from Robert of Béthune after the Battle of Kortrijk in 1302, were confirmed. No tax could be levied on merchandise transported from France to Flanders and to Brabant. The only courts that were allowed to judge inhabitants of the cities were the courts of these cities.

One and only coinage would be used in France, Flanders and Brabant, and this coinage would also be valid in England. The value of the coins would be unalterable.

King Edward promised much for the support of the Flemish cities in his war effort.

The traitorous behaviour of the king of France and of the count of Flanders thus resulted in drawing the Flemish aldermen much closer still to the king of England, the contrary of the

effect sought by Philip and Louis. Their strategy had backfired, at least for the moment. More than ever, the fame of James van Artevelde soared in Flanders.

In Ghent, on twenty-six January of 1340, Edward III quartered his badge of golden lions with the fleur-de-lys of France. Henceforth, the standard of the king of England bore the lions as well as the lilies. The king of England thus solemnly and firmly announced his claim over France. This outward sign had been advised by James van Artevelde. Philip of Valois soon learned of this change in symbols on the royal English standard. He fulminated all the more when he heard where Edward had claimed France.

A Banquet

King Edward III and his wife Philippa liked to hold court in style and grandeur. The alderman Maes van Vaernewijc had heard of the king's love of extravagance, so when Edward arrived in November of 1339, he argued in the city council Ghent should feel obliged to stage a series of fine entertainments for the royal court. The aldermen of the city happily complied, for no people in Flanders loved feasting and showing off how well they could receive distinguished guests as the *Gentenaars*. Although it was November, humid and cold weather, they erected an enormous tent in the *Bijloke* Field, warmed the air with a set of small portable hearths, placed long tables and endless rows of chairs, to propose a lavish evening dinner. About three hundred people were invited, almost a hundred of Edward's court and two hundred members of the best families of Ghent.

The invited men and women streamed into the tent from the early afternoon on. James van Artevelde and the van Vaernewijc brothers had come in early, to make sure all was ready to receive the royal guests with the pomp and solemnity that was their due. The man who was in charge of the organisation was Gillis Vresele, however, so van Artevelde had little to add but his presence. He was quite satisfied noticing the *Gentenaars* who trickled in were dressed as wealthy knights. Their ladies wore marvellous gowns of silk and fine wool to the latest fashion. James van Artevelde saw the fine dresses proudly worn, bright hues on all, and the women had made up elaborate hair pieces of which he wondered how they held on the ladies' heads. Silk and lace, ermine lined coats and the finest striped wool was worn elegantly, with much distinction.

The aldermen allowed only daggers for weapons, tight in leather scabbards finely decorated, no swords or other arms. Heralds announced the meal and the stewards of the town guided everybody to places according to an elaborate protocol.

King Edward and Queen Philippa entered in the early evening, accompanied by the sounds of ceremonial trumpets and the applause of a filled tent. Musicians with lutes, harps, flutes and soft drums played lively tunes while the king and queen were brought to their seats in the middle of the most wonderfully decorated table. When they sat, they found James van Artevelde and Catherine de Coster at their side. James sat next to Philippa, Catherine next to the king. The musicians continued to play and for quite a while, the royal couple seemed to enjoy the sounds. They looked around, but exchanged few words among each other. Two groups of tumblers and jesters entertained the court for a few moments. Then, when all the chairs had been occupied, heralds announced the dishes while an army of liveried servants brought in the plates of food.

The *Gentenaars* showed to the king how, despite their adverse fate of the last years, they still had not forgotten how to receive and please a king. One plate after the other of delicacies was placed on the tables. Some of the plates were magnificent works of art in food. Roasted fowl, boiled fowl, roasted pork, pieces of venison, vegetables of all sorts, baskets of fruit, endless lines of pastries and of honeyed cakes, all nicely presented in sculptures, were shown to the king.

King Edward III seemed not to have expected less. His face showed no astonishment. He began to eat with relish and invited everybody with a long gesture of his hand and a bow of his head to do the same. The hall had remained silent until then, now the men and women buzzed with conversations. King Edward ate, wiping thick gruel now and then from his beard, and taking notice of how half-finished enormous platters were being replaced by more colourful and even more delicious foods. Most of these dishes had been ordered from Gillis Vresele, who had been asked to organise and stage the dinner. Gillis ran from table to table like a lion in a cage, commanding the servants, shouting where to intervene when the stewards had forgotten a group of invitees. He had two cooks at his side, listened to advice, but commanded his army.

That evening, James van Artevelde had at first remained quiet. He did not really know whether he could address the queen or had to wait for questions. He did not want to be a boor! He also did not know what to say to Queen Philippa. What might interest a queen at table? He did notice the queen enjoyed her fowl, though she only took small morsels at a time. She too used a napkin often, dabbing at her lips, and she seemed to hum to the music, listening intently. She moved her head on the languorous tones, which were regularly broken with happier, faster tunes. She also enjoyed her wine, James remarked, though she remained very moderate in the quantities. She merely sipped each time, but did that quite often.

James had also looked a few times at how his wife, Catherine, was doing on the other side of the king. He had to bow his head down for that, look over the dishes past Philippa and past the king. Philippa did not seem to notice his movement, his furtive glances. James saw Catherine engaged in vivid conversation with King Edward, toasting her sweet, white wine with the king, looking at him with flirting eyes, and obviously enjoying herself to the extreme. James saw her now throwing her neck backwards and send a pearling laugh into the tent at one or other witty remark or joke of the king. They sometimes leaned their heads towards each other to better hear what they were saying.

Edward III had been fifteen years old when he ascended the throne of England in 1327. He was now twenty-seven years old. Catherine was almost the same age, two years younger. James was an old man compared to Edward, almost twenty years older than Catherine, forty-six years old. James felt the weight of his years.

James had to lean forward more and more to see what Catherine did next. Philippa suddenly remarked to where James was looking, followed his glance, and James saw a glimmer of hurt, anger and bitterness in a twitch of her mouth and eyebrows. A veil of sadness came over her face. James and Philippa had both mixed feelings about how Catherine and Edward were liking each other's company. James reddened, drew back. Philippa craned her neck in pride.

James felt he had to divert the queen's attention from what was happening on her right side, but he could not tear his thoughts entirely away from Edward. Deciding he would not wait for Philippa to speak to him first, he scraped his throat.

James van Artevelde leaned to his neighbour, Lady Philippa, and whispered, 'I am sorry, lady Philippa, but I have been wondering how you met King Edward for marriage. How did a lady of Hainault meet a king of England?'

Lady Philippa looked with her dark brown eyes straight into James's eyes.

She seemed to hesitate, then she looked at her spoon and replied, 'my mother, Sir van Artevelde, was Jeanne, daughter of the French King Charles of Valois. King Charles was ill in late December of 1325, so my mother and I visited him in Paris. Charles's other daughter and sister to my mother, Isabella, queen of England, was also in Paris with her son. We met them. I was twelve then, and Edward fourteen.'

She sighed. 'Maybe it was love on first sight. We talked and found us particularly easy in each other's presence. Edward proposed to marry me, and the powerful men of the lands seemed not to mind, find a marriage even a good thing. Edward was of course a non-entity then, but he was the heir of England and might one day become important on the chess board of alliances. We were second cousins, however, and therefore needed papal dispensation, for we were well within the degrees of blood relationship forbidden by the church. The pope and the curia first refused the dispensation. I learnt much later the pope feared our union might from a strong link of interests between Emperor Lewis the Bavarian and the English court. You no doubt know of the constant strives in Italy between pope and emperor. The English court insisted, however, and so our dispensation was finally but only granted at the end of August of 1327. In December of that year, I travelled to England, accompanied by Sir Walter de Manny of our Hainault court as guide. Our marriage was sealed in York, a fine town, on the twenty-fifth of January of 1328. That year was disastrous for Flanders, wasn't it?'

'The year 1328 was indeed a calamitous year for Flanders, and 1329 may have been worse, my lady. Many Flemings were killed. The Battle of Cassel was not a battle of the knights of Flanders, and also not a battle of the militia of the cities, however, not a battle of one of our organised armies. Farmers and peasants confronted a French army of trained knights and mercenaries, and the Flemish troops forgot a very simple principle of war,' James van Artevelde replied, wondering why the queen remembered a host of a humiliating defeat.

'What principle?' Philippa asked, suddenly quite alert to what James was telling.

'Never attack battles of armoured knights who fight the Norman way! Facing such armies, always take an entrenched, defensive stand, and defend one's positions to the end.'

Philippa smiled, 'it seems to me I hear my husband talking, Sir James. He tells me almost every day how the English defeated the Scots, on foot, waiting for the onslaught of the Scottish knights, and using his archers.'

'Then the English have learned to fight like the Flemish militia, my lady,' James van Artevelde laughed too.

He added, quite serious, 'it is the only way to defeat a French feudal army!'

'Tell me, Sir James,' Philippa continued innocently and a little sardonically, 'why should Flanders be so important to my husband? Flanders is a small county, compared to the lands of my father of Hainault, who is also count of Holland and Zeeland!'

The question came almost like an insult. Maybe Philippa wanted to draw James out, he wondered, or she truly had no idea what Edward was doing in Ghent.

James readied to reply patiently, when he heard high laughter again on the other side of the Queen. Philippa turned away from James, looked quite irritated to her husband's side, who ignored her.

'Proportions,' James whispered, thinking Queen Philippa had not heard him, but she had, and she brought her face quickly back to James, looked at him surprised and repeated, 'proportions, Sir James? What do you mean?'

Philippa looked earnestly at James, and James dared to look more closely at Lady Philippa. She had a fine, full mouth, a small and uplifted nose, not striking but very large, deep, warm, brown eyes. Her hair was brown too, quite luxurious but tugged under a high, starched bonnet. Philippa could not entirely master the curls of her thick hair, so the curls crept away at every angle. Her face could not prove the sophisticated elegance, discipline of some of the Ghent ladies, but at least her face provided a tinge of natural beauty those ladies lacked. Philippa was tall, taller than Catherine, and probably even taller than he, James. She was a formidable woman, quite the contrary of the petite delicacy James's first wife had been. Had Edward wanted to conquer Philippa of Hainault for this reason?

'Yes, proportions, my lady,' James van Artevelde resumed with a sigh, having been reminded of his beautiful but deceased Agneete.

'Flanders is small indeed. In population I guess if Flanders is one, England should be four and maybe six with Guyenne and Gascony, whereas France would be twenty. You might no doubt wonder how a country twenty times or more smaller in inhabitants than France might withstand France's king!'

'I do indeed, Sir James,' Philippa challenged James van Artevelde mockingly.

James noticed a twinkle of amusement appear on Philippa's eyebrows and lips. Philippa was teasing him into words.

'She is irritated this evening, she is in a bad mood,' James thought. 'Catherine has made her angry, jealous maybe. I must be cautious!'

But James felt irritated too, for reasons he did not understand well, so he continued.

'In proportions of wealth, of value of produce, in power of production, in return on trade, the proportions it seems to me become rather like one for Flanders to two for England, and ten for France.'

'Staggering differences still, Sir James!'

'Quite so, my lady! In numbers of warriors that can be brought into a battlefield on the continent, the proportions are rather like one for Flanders, one for England, and maybe two for France, but France having very long and many frontiers, she is being reduced also to one along our frontier. It is this final proportion that France's King Philip fears. In proportions of armies, Flanders is practical as powerful as France.'

'How is that possible? Explain to me, please, Sir James.'

'The army of France is a typical feudal army, my lady. The French king announces the *arrière-ban*, his call to weapons, and all the knights who owe him feudal service must then bring a determined number of knights to the king. The men that are so brought are formidable, armoured knights on destriers, capable of wiping everything from the earth in front of them, but this army is far from as numerous as one might expect. Only a very small part of the population of France goes to war with the king and his nobles. The King also hires troops by indentures, by *lettres de retenue*. He has to hire Genoese crossbowmen, and mercenaries are expensive. The king also has to pay for the knights he calls to him, for otherwise they send their cats only. Assembling an army is therefore a ruinous affair for France, though the king has vast resources from various taxes.'

'The same holds for my husband,' Philippa remarked.

'It does, my lady,' James acknowledged. 'King Edward also has to pay for an army. He can promise looting and ransoms, however, for he will fight in foreign territory, which the French king cannot! Still, King Edward's financial situation is worse than the one of the French king,' James added mercilessly, 'for the obligatory feudal service has almost entirely disappeared in England, even though it would be rude to refuse the king of England. England brings a lot less knights to the battlefield, and many more warriors on foot, these men being

lightly armed, swift, but vulnerable to attacks by heavily armoured knights, yet more suited for defence. King Edward also relies much on the indentures, on contracts drawn up with lords for a certain number of men at a negotiated scale of pay. Such armies are expensive, especially for a country like England that has fewer resources of production than vast France or wealthy Flanders! Also, King Edward has to sail with his army over the Channel waters. He needs ships for that, probably a thousand ships for an army of twenty thousand men with weapons, victuals, horses and siege engines. Such an expedition can only happen at huge cost!’

Philippa looked at her fingers.

‘And then there is Flanders,’ James van Artevelde continued, driving the nail further down, but his brain addled with suspicions as to why he was talking to the queen and she listening intently.

‘The count of Flanders can summon the same kind of army as the kings of England and France, but his troops would amount to less than one tenth of the armies of France and England, and you would be totally right in stating the weight of Flanders would be minimum, in view of the other forces. There is another army of Flanders, however, my lady.’

‘What other army?’ Philippa grinned, ‘an army of peasants?’

‘The army constituted by the militia of the cities, a well-armed and well-trained, well-led and well organised army. The three largest cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, have together more inhabitants than Paris, and three or four times more inhabitants than London. Ghent alone is twice as large as London! In France and in England, the towns have not formed large militia. They are not allowed to do so, for military power lies solely with the king and the kings do not tolerate another force as large as theirs in the country. Not so in Flanders! The cities of Flanders, not just Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, other towns too, can throw into the field and within a few days, an army of twenty thousand men. Adding to that the army of the castellanies of the petty nobles, of the countryside, such as of the *Brugse Vrije* and the territories controlled by Ghent, we can confront the king of France with an army as large as the royal feudal army, amounting to as much as thirty thousand men. With such an army at his side, King Edward would be invincible on the continent! And what is even more interesting, is that this army of city militia is far cheaper than an army levied by indentures. The cities have to pay for the men’s upkeep, of course, for weapons and food, for fodder for the horses, for the wagons that move provisions, but the men fight for freedom and honour, at almost no pay!’

‘Such an army cannot remain for long on campaign, though,’ Philippa argued acidly, ‘for remaining without workers would be ruinous for the cities! Such an army can serve well when the county is invaded, not for other purposes.’

‘I grant you victory of logic, my lady,’ James laughed, aware of Philippa’s intelligence. ‘The militia cannot stay longer than one month, two at the most, on campaign. Then, the men have to return home or their families starve. But how long can a king hold an army on campaign before he ruins his finances? You are absolutely right, though. Here is the main disadvantage of the urban army of Flanders!’

Philippa remained pensive.

James van Artevelde would not stop then. He wanted Philippa and King Edward to know he, James, realised fully why Ghent was valuable to England.

‘Flanders is important for other reasons,’ James whispered again.

Philippa jerked her head back to James.

‘For which other reasons?’

‘How eager she is for such practical matters,’ James thought. ‘Is it Philippa who thinks with and for her husband, the king?’

‘King Edward needs money for his expeditions into France. The money comes from taxes, but also from the bales of wool sold by England to Flanders. King Edward had much to gain by a booming cloth industry in Flanders. We heard he levied higher taxes on bales.’

Philippa remained silent.

James van Artevelde continued, ‘King Edward not only levied high taxes on wool. He tried to secure a true monopoly on wool for himself. With the aid of the main wool merchants of England, men like William de la Pole of Hull and Reginald de Conductu of London, wool has been purchased for the king at a fixed price. Not until the enormous amount of the king’s thirty thousand bales of wool had been collected, would any wool have been allowed to leave England, and then the plan was to sell the wool at the highest prices on the continent, granting a huge profit of more than two hundred thousand pounds sterling to the king.’

James looked at Philippa, but she only bowed her head and ate. He saw she nevertheless listened.

‘This scheme failed,’ James said dryly. ‘Not enough wool could be collected. The wool shepherds and the merchants refused to sell at the fixed, low price. The shepherds hid their wool. At the most, only ten thousand bales ultimately reached Brabant and Flanders. The ships King Edward had requisitioned for the transport remained idle, which cost the royal treasury a fortune. King Edward had therefore to postpone his plans for a massive invasion to Flanders in 1338. At the beginning of that year, King Edward could not meet his financial obligations. In March, he borrowed vast sums from the Bardi and the Peruzzi of Florence. All through the summer, he tried to put his hands on enough wool to finance his expedition, and he failed again. In December of 1337, the king assembled a parliament at Westminster to be granted half the wool in the realm, his rest of the twenty thousand bales. In March, the king again forbade all export of wool until his share had been gathered. The wool remained at Dordrecht until a delegation of Flemish merchants arrived from our city to secure the sale. From spring to summer of 1339, King Edward was in Antwerp, waiting because of financial difficulties. He found himself in a precarious financial situation. Part of his wool arrived only in April and was sold during that summer, but the king had to borrow again, in order to maintain his small army in Brabant. He borrowed from many men, even from Rufus Vivelin, a Jew of Strasbourg. He borrowed from a long list of men, also from English merchants. I believe his financial worries are more or less finished, today, though. Flanders and England are linked into the same interests, my lady. Not only we desperately need wool. The king of England needs our money! And there is more.’

Philippa still kept her silence.

‘King Edward must invade the continent to wage war on King Philip,’ James continued. ‘He can do that from out of Guyenne, out of Bordeaux, but Bordeaux lies far from the Thames and the distance from Bordeaux to Paris is great. Marching from Bordeaux to Paris with horses, wagons, thousands of men, through hostile territory, must be a tantalising, daunting experience. Where will the army leaders get food for the men when all the farmers hide their produce and divert their livestock out of the region of the advancing army? Where will the fodder for the horses come from? What if King Philip scorches the earth in front of King Edward’s army? Are the English earls Hannibals? No, King Edward needs a reliable base to march from, closer to Paris. The way from the Thames to Sluis is the shortest. It would be good for the king to disembark his army in friendly territory, in lands where he can buy all the food he needs, good food, from a grateful, helpful population. The roads from the southern towns of Flanders to Paris are easy, almost flat, hardened to the pelting rains. The wagons will

not roll in mud. The Flemish can transport provisions quickly over the rivers Leie and Scheldt to within deep of France. The distance from Sluis to Paris is short, and much of it lies in friendly territory. If necessary, the king could retreat within the frontiers of Flanders to safety, where his army would be doubled in numbers by the militia of the cities. The ideal for him would be for the cities to support him in his attack on France from the north. The combined armies of England and of the Flemish cities would be an impossible power for King Philip to withstand. And that is not all!

Philippa could not resist, 'what more is there?'

She now hung at James's lips.

'King Edward has used the last year to forge alliances in the Low Countries, alliances with Brabant, Hainault, Guelders, Jülich and other counties, aimed at creating enemies for Philip on the king of France's northern border. The alliances have been concluded, much by the support of the German emperor. The feudal armies of Emperor Lewis might join your husband, but the lords of the lands have been reluctant to comply. When they did comply, as in the past campaign, their zeal was given half-heartedly. They brought inferior forces. What, however, if the second armies that loom in those counties, the armies of the militia of the cities of Brabant, Hainault, Namur, Guelders, Jülich and other, joined the militia of Ghent? Then, King Edward would triple his army!'

Philippa looked astonished at James.

She kept her silence, then murmured, 'I did not know so much was at stake.'

James was surprised, but he believed her.

Philippa leaned towards James van Artevelde, saying, 'and that is, Sir James, why I must be given in hostage to Ghent, isn't it? My husband, the king, will soon leave from here, and I must stay a prisoner.'

'The king has promised much and many promises have been accompanied by pledges of huge sums of money to the cities. The aldermen of the Flemish cities have contacts with the Lombard traders, who have contacts with the Lombard bankers. We know the crowns of the king have been pawned. We know the king borrowed considerable sums from the Bardi and the Peruzzi of Florence. The representatives of Flanders are for the most part knights, poorter knights, but knights all the same. They live from trade and from lending money for business ventures. They wanted guarantees in the transactions.'

'And I am to be the guarantee? Is a pregnant woman so valuable as to be a guarantee?'

Now it was for James van Artevelde to remain stunned. His face went very pale. He was the very first man in Ghent to hear Philippa was pregnant. He was appalled.

'What kind of man leaves his pregnant wife in hostage in a foreign country,' he wondered.

'How ambitious, cruel, hard-hearted, desperate, can a man become? Am I becoming such a man too?'

Philippa looked at van Artevelde, with pleading eyes, waiting for a reaction that did not come easily. James was too stunned.

He kept a long silence, and then said, 'do not consider yourself as a hostage, my lady. You are the guest of the city of Ghent and under the protection of the militia of the town. The militia of Ghent obey me. I am their captain. I command thousands, many more men than the count of Flanders or even the king of France might ever bring to this city. I, personally, swear to you the holy oath that you and your children shall not be harmed. We will provide you with all you need. I swear that if your well-being would be endangered, the militia of Ghent would always stand between the men that would want to harm you and your person. If that is not

enough, a group of determined men from Ghent will bring you to safety by other means. You may rest assured that you will be as safe in Ghent as in any town of England.'

James van Artevelde made his promise with a quivering voice in which Philippa must have heard a mixture of anger, loathing, but also passion and earnestness. Philippa was impressed, and clearly relieved. She grabbed James's hand in a spontaneous gesture. James understood then how Philippa had feared this evening and how she had lived in fear since the few days her husband had told her she would have to stay in rude Flanders while he would leave. What a contrast had she endured between her haughty appearance this evening and the doubts and fears inside her heart!

'Thank you, Sir van Artevelde,' Philippa whispered. 'I will not forget your offer. I did fear lacking friends among the knights of Flanders!'

James grinned, 'you may well have a few friends among the knights, my lady. The two brothers van Vaernewijc, sitting in front of you, members of the noblest family of Ghent, are supporters of you, and many more such men sit in this hall. I am not one of them, though!'

'You are not my friend, then,' Philippa said, already in dismay.

'I am, my lady! I meant, I am not a knight! Your husband graciously addresses me by the title of "Sir", as you do, but I am no knight. Still, the oath and promises of a commoner can be stronger than the oaths of knights.'

Philippa was surprised again. James saw she had not known he was not a nobleman.

Philippa resumed, 'who cares about whether you have been born noble or not, Sir van Artevelde? In my native Hainault, so much French in upbringing and culture, having a commoner lead an army would be quite inconceivable. I am English now, though! I was quite astonished when I arrived in England to meet at court many army leaders and influential men, advisers of the king, who were not high-born. My husband likes men who have won his esteem not because they were born noble, but because they gained wealth and power by their own brain. At court are men who have led groups, armies, to victory because of their cunning and courage in battle. My king regularly honours these men, even up to bestowing earldoms on them. I have to admit I had it difficult in the beginning to accept this difference of view from what I was used to in Hainault. But with time, I too learned to appreciate these men. The real valour of a man lies in his character and in his deeds, much more so than in his birth. I do believe that God honours a child by granting it high birth, but does God also not direct the destiny of all men, including the destinies that bring men such as you to the foreground as leader of others? I admire honest men more now than high-born men, Sir van Artevelde. I too appreciate the nobility of the heart more than the nobility of the blood!'

James noticed with surprise he was still holding Queen Philippa's hand, and that he was actually squeezing it to lend her courage. He reddened, withdrew his hand, and received a smile that was much warmer, gentler, softer, in a happier face than he had seen only moments before.

They kept a silence again, ate, until the queen asked, 'please introduce me better to your friends in front of me, Sir van Artevelde. Van Vaernewijc is their name?'

James introduced Queen Philippa to the alderman Maes van Vaernewijc and to Maes's younger brother William, the captain. Soon, the four of them were engaged in a lively conversation about the abbeys, churches, halls, and the finest streets of Ghent. Queen Philippa almost totally ignored her husband, the king, for the rest of the evening.

Catherine

For the first time in her life, Catherine de Coster had met a man who fascinated her, with whom she felt at ease, who flattered her with words that reached her heart – and, she realised with some suspicion - her vanity, and who seemed genuinely interested in her person. When he had touched her hand, leaned his shoulder against hers, appealed languorously to her eyes, she had quivered and felt waves of subdued passion make her blood boil, rise to her face in a scarlet blush, warm her body, and force her to think about a powerful naked male weighing on her. She had wondered what power, what magic charm had taken possession of her. The man who had caused such turmoil in the otherwise cold, calculated, logical, unfeeling woman, was King Edward III of England.

Catherine had been conquered like an irresistible army had besieged and captured an impregnable fortified place, which had opened its gates large at the first assault. Never in her life had she met a man who had forced upon her at first sight such desire as she experienced now. Catherine had always thought of love as of a feeling that was totally overrated, a feeling poets dreamed and wrote about, but which was reserved for weaker souls. Catherine was overwhelmed, lost, subdued, tamed, and confused in the emotions that filled her being. And this had happened to her in only a few hours of a wonderful evening, at an official dinner organised by her town, among hundreds of distinguished guests. Despite the audience, she had surrendered.

Catherine gave no thought to her husband, to James van Artevelde, nor to how he might react to her secret passion. Her marriage had been a business arrangement, a temporary convenience, in which feelings had played no role. Catherine had respected the great man that Artevelde was in Ghent. When she had found out how very wealthy he truly was, she had been even more amazed, but that respect had rapidly dwindled in the marriage when she had found out James had not been alone in forging his fame and fortune. James was a member of a group of people who came to decisions together! James's strength, presence, courage, were very relative, his determination only great when his friends backed him and told him he did the right thing. Otherwise, he might have shivered and hesitated. Catherine had discovered James was not as sure of himself as she might have thought, and that was a fatal weakness. Catherine had sought the contrary of weakness in a man! James was gentle with her, but he did not dominate her, as no man had ever dominated and tamed her. Intellectually also, she felt his like if not his superior. Since she had not experienced any particular physical attraction to James, she did not share the same room and bed at night. Catherine had insisted on her privacy. James had children. Why would he want more? Respect there might have lain between the Arteveldes, love was lost between them.

Edward was quite another kind of man! With Edward, Catherine seemed to be a very young girl again, so strong and self-assured and yet gentle he was, and she longed to be in his presence with a yearning that was a totally new, unexpected, over-arching experience to her. He had kissed her hand, his lips merely glancing over her fingers, but she had felt the flames of passion devour her loins.

‘So, this must be love,’ Catherine thought. ‘How strange and powerful a feeling! How the gods must be mocking me, laughing at me, to have thrown me in this state. What should I do now? The only thing I desire is to be in his presence, but how can that be when I am married, and when he is married to that cow Philippa and when he is a king and I a common woman?’ Nevertheless, if fate had caused them to meet, fate must have had a higher purpose in mind than merely a scarce encounter! Catherine was still an attractive woman, she knew! She was

tall, imposing, had a fine face with quite regular and not too angular traits, a small waist, sufficiently alluring, broad hips that swayed when she walked, long and fine legs, luxuriant buttocks unwrinkled by fat, heavy and well-formed breasts, belly untouched by the scars of childbirth. She had so often passed a mirror over her naked body and studied her figure, considered a man might still desire what she had to offer. What might Edward desire of her except her body? Was he interested only in carnal desire? Did he admire her as much as she adored him? Would he want to know what her husband was thinking of? Was he using her to learn more information about Ghent, about the aldermen, about how loyal van Artevelde was to him, what James's character was like? Well, she could give all of that to Edward! Gladly! James was a simple and open book to her. He was not a complex, warped personality! What did Edward want to know? The problem was how she could meet again with the king, and that was the real rub that caused her despair. How could she penetrate the defences of an ever-present, numerous court?

Catherine de Coster did not have to wait for long. She received an invitation, carried by a messenger in the royal livery of the kings of England, delivered at her house in the *Kalanderberg*, notifying her that the queen of England desired her presence at court the next day at the Saint Bavo abbey. A squire would present himself at her house at a determined hour of the day, in the late afternoon. The queen was not the king, but Catherine felt nonetheless exhilarated. She did not have anything to tell James van Artevelde of the visit, for he was not in his house, and would not be so for the next four days.

At the appointed hour, a squire dressed in the royal livery of England indeed knocked at her door. He was a very young knight on horseback, who drew a fine ladies' palfrey with him for Catherine to ride on. Catherine had thought to go on foot, but she accepted the animal. She had exchanged only a few words with Queen Philippa, and never mentioned to her she could ride on horses. She had whispered to Edward, however, her passion for horses. Apparently, riding on horses was taken for granted in England.

Catherine rode behind the squire to the abbey. Queen Philippa's quarters were situated deep inside the abbey, near the cloister. The squire guided her to the rooms of the guest house, however, where part of the English court had found lodging. The squire reigned his horse in, dismounted, signalled Catherine to do the same, helped her, and he pointed to yet another squire. This servant led her through long corridors in which she encountered knights she had seen on the banquet. The knights greeted, but otherwise ignored her. Finally, the squire opened a door guarded by two men-at-arms of England, and Catherine entered a large room, her winter cloak still on her back, her cape on her head.

The room was richly decorated with tapestries, not the tapestries one would have imagined in an abbey. They showed mythological themes, not religious ones. Finely carved furniture stood sparsely in the room, a table, chairs, and candelabras. Flames flickered in a large hearth. A chair had been placed before the fire and in that chair moved a figure, a man, who looked up as she entered.

Then, the man saw who had come in, and he jumped up, stepped to Catherine with tired, languid steps, kissed her hand, and said, 'how are you this evening, lady Catherine?'

King Edward held her hand. There was no sign of Queen Philippa in the room.

'I thought we might continue our banquet,' Edward grinned, leading Catherine to the table. 'I hope you are hungry!'

Edward made Catherine sit next to him at the table. Then he went outside the room, and a little later servants covered the table with dishes. Edward bode Catherine to eat and to drink.

They chatted happily during the dinner. Edward talked about the English court and he also wanted to know who Catherine was, what she had done before her marriage, what she did now.

After the dinner, when the servants had cleared the table, more wine was brought in. King Edward took Catherine to the warmth of the hearth. The heat of the huge logs that crackled in front of her warmed Catherine. She felt a little flushed from the sweet, white wine he had served. They continued to talk. Their chairs touched.

After a while, Edward dared to touch her hand anew, then her arm, and then his touch evolved to a caress. The king stood, poked in the fire, and rearranged the logs, kneeling before the hearth. Catherine went to sit closer to the fire, also kneeling on the thick tapestries that covered the tiles of the floor. Edward kept his silence, stared into the flames. He put new logs on the fire.

Then, he looked at Catherine, and their eyes locked. He brought his face closer to Catherine's, seemed to hesitate an instant, and then kissed her on the lips. The kiss was not refused and it lasted. Edward snaked his arms around Catherine, embracing her, drawing her to his breast. She settled in his arms.

Edward finally withdrew, the smile of victory and conquest in his dark eyes, a flicker of passion in his irises. He went to sit closer to Catherine and ran his long fingers along her spine. Catherine trembled, her skin reacted and quivered under his touch. A shiver of passion tore through her body. Edward began delicately and very slowly to unlace her bodice, and she let him.

The Treaty with Brabant

In August of 1339 new aldermen were appointed in Ghent. As earlier, the choice was made by a group of four men out of the current aldermen and four indicated by the count. These included the fuller John van Lens, the cordwainer Roger de Smet and the traditional men from the main families like Simon Parijs, who became first alderman, Baldwin van Walle, Gillis Rijnvisch, Thomas van Vaernewijc, William de Bomere, Michael de Witte, Henry Goethals, John de Bake and Simon van Merelbeke. John van Steenbeke became dean of the weavers. Van Steenbeke was an ambitious knight. He would also be chosen to the Council of Flanders in late 1339, an advisory group to Count Louis de Nevers.

As James van Artevelde had told Philippa of Hainault, queen of England, he had been working throughout the year of 1339 on a treaty with Brabant, a treaty that could complement already existing treaties of cooperation between Flanders and Brabant concluded in April of 1337. James had induced influential knights and aldermen of Flanders to negotiate and sign the new treaty. Meetings for discussions of the text had taken place as well in Brussels as in Ghent. James had travelled several times to Brussels, accompanied by the aldermen of Ghent, by members of the Bette, Damman, Rijnvisch, van Vaernewijc, and other families. The final text of the treaty was for an alliance between Flanders and Brabant, not only between the cities, but also between the count of Flanders and the duke of Brabant. The duke would sign the treaty and swear the accompanying oath at the beginning of December of 1339.

James van Artevelde and two of his friends of the Pharaïldis group, Raes van Lake the Elder and Arnout de Hert, rode from Ghent to Brussels on the first day of December. It was cold, but not very humid, the weather was fine while they rode in heavy coats lined with furs on horses thick with their winter hair. It was invigorating weather, and James van Artevelde and

his companions were in a good mood. They arrived at Brussels from the north, at the Gate of Laken. James and his two friends halted at the gate, admiring its structure. The gate was imposing, announcing a large city behind. It inspired a fine impression of power and order to the men. It was built over the town moat that was filled with water of the Senne River, water that protected the walls of the city to the north, west and part of the south. The fortified walls of Brussels were still being built in places, but they would encompass the old city as well as the extensions of the town, beyond the first moat of the old city. Perpendicular to the moat ran the river Senne itself, here, so that the gate formed a double bridge. The men had passed and would have to pass the Senne several times. In Brussels, the river ran from the south-west, between the Obbrussel Gate in the south and the Guyskine Gate in the west to the north, to this Bridge and Gate of Laken, flowing under the roads in the centre of the city.

The bridge of Laken was built over the moat of Brussels. The bridge continued the road into the city, but one had to pass a well-guarded gatehouse here.

The gate was built as much as a bridge than as a strong defence. One reached the first structure over a high, paved road under which lay the moat, to arrive at two square towers on each side of the heavy, oak gate. The panels were set in a gatehouse standing between the two towers, from where one rode between high walls to yet another gate, this one placed inside a huge, round, squat tower of extremely thick stone walls with crenelated embattlements above. Only a few, very small openings for crossbowmen had been left in the tower walls, high above the road. Behind this tower and aside of it, stood a large, rectangular house-like building, constructed behind and to the left, with open arches under which ran the Senne. One passed in the tower, under the large house, at ground level, passed between smaller guard houses, into the *Lakensestraat*, which led to the centre of Brussels. The building to the left, under which the Senne flowed, held a prison of Brussels. The men rode on this street to the right, then left, to pass a smaller and older gate, the Small Gate of Laken, riding then along the *Begijnhof*, the beguinage of Brussels.

They rode to yet another building of stone built over another moat filled with water. The water here was called the *Wolvengracht*, the Moat of the Wolves, named not after the animals but after a man with the name of Wolf who in early times had lived there.

They continued their journey a little further to the *Steenweg*, simply called the Road, the main street of the inner city, which ran from the Gate of Saint Catherine in the west to the Coudenberg, where the castle of the dukes of Brabant stood. The dukes of Brabant had transferred their court from Leuven to Brussels at the beginning of the century. The old castle was small, still being enlarged and embellished. Behind the castle lay a fine green zone of pastures and woods, where also vineyards grew, and this area too was being modified by the dukes into a large courtyard where they staged tournaments.

James van Artevelde brought his friends to an inn near the Saint Nicholas church. He found the inn convenient, the people nice, the service correct, and the beds in the rooms clear of bugs. The inn was situated between the church and the *Broodhuis*, the Bread House, the guild house and market of the bakers of Brussels. James van Artevelde and his companions went to pray in the Saint Nicholas church to thank for their safe journey. When he was in Brussels, James also prayed in the chapel of the very influential crossbowmen guild on the *Zavelberg*, a little further.

In the inn, James van Artevelde, Raes and Arnout, went over the final text of the treaty with Brabant, and discussing the contents a last time. The treaty with Brabant had slowly, painstakingly evolved to an alliance between the cities and the lords of the lands. Without the

assiduity of James van Artevelde and his friends, the treaty would have been abandoned months ago.

The treaty began by recognising that the inhabitants of the two regions could subsist but by their crafts and industries, a theme dear to the Pharaïldis men. Prime conditions for crafts and industries were the maintenance of the peace and of the liberties of the people, another theme dear to the cities. The alliance had therefore as aim to guarantee the lives, the possessions, the liberties and the industry of the people, to avoid discord and effusion of blood among the counties. The cities promised to support each other against their mutual enemies, so it had become a defensive alliance as well. The princes of Flanders and of Brabant swore not to engage in wars without the previous agreement of the representatives of the two lands. Furthermore, the merchants of the two counties would be free to move, sell and buy any merchandise. One common coinage would be used in the two counties, and the coinage would be verified by representatives of both counties. For crimes or injustices, the courts would have to contact the town the criminal originated from, and justice had to be pronounced within eight days. If that was not possible, a council of ten judges was to be assembled, four designated by the count of Flanders and the duke of Brabant, six others by the cities. This court would assemble in the county of the plaintiff, also to judge within eight days. All wars or vengeance or challenges between the two counties would be suspended, so that free commerce would not be hindered.

When one of the princes or one of the towns did not respect the conventions of the treaty, the other parties would assemble without delay to have the treaty be respected, using all their power.

The two princes of Flanders and Brabant and the representatives of the six main towns of Flanders and Brabant would in the future meet three times a year, in Ghent on the fourteenth day after Candlemas, in Brussels the fourteenth day after the birth of Saint John the Baptist, and in Aalst on the fourteenth day after All Saints. During these meetings, all matters concerning the alliance and the development of the wealth and industry of the two counties would be discussed.

James, Raes and Arnout laid down the paper with the text on the table, between their beakers of ale. They were aware of the importance of the alliance and of the principles written for the very first time on the parchments that would be signed. For one of the first times in history, the well-being of the people was recognised as an aim for the princes of the lands. The alliance forged strong links of mutual help in case of aggression, and trade would be boosted by the use of one and the same coinage.

The treaty would be signed and sworn tomorrow, on the third of December of 1339 by the duke of Brabant, in the presence of numerous knights and aldermen of Flanders and Brabant, whose names would be explicitly mentioned in the treaty. The mayors, aldermen and councils of Leuven, Brussels, Antwerp, 's Hertogenbosch, Nivelles, Tienen and Leeuw for Brabant, and Ghent, Bruges, Ieper, Kortrijk, Oudenaarde, Aalst and Geraardsbergen for Flanders would sign. The treaty also bound the castellanies of the two lands. Witness to the treaty was Arnold, abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Gembloux for the bishopric of Liège. Arnold had blessed the charter. The choice of this religious witness had also been somewhat of a headache for James van Artevelde, for the Flemish did not wish the French bishop of Arras in whose diocese Flanders lay to sign, neither did Brabant like the French bishop of Cambrai. Part of Brabant lay in the bishopric of Liège, so the abbot of Gembloux, an influential and grand abbey near Namur, had been a fine solution agreeable to Flanders and to Brabant.

The next morning, James van Artevelde and his counsellors met the delegates from Ghent, and then in group, they went on foot along the *Steenweg* to the duke's castle. The treaty would be signed in the large hall. When James entered the hall, all eyes turned to him, but he had only eyes at first for the magnificent decoration, which impressed him much. The hall was adorned with the shields of the lords of Brabant and in the walls hung the flags of Brabant and Flanders, as well as the flags of the cities. The men were overwhelmed by the grandeur and the multitude of colours that assaulted their senses. No special applause was given to James van Artevelde, and van Artevelde's name would not be mentioned in the treaty, but all the men in the hall knew that this alliance was his work. James greeted the men he had met before, others were introduced to him. At the end of the hall stood a wooden, painted dais, upon which throned John, duke of Brabant, who was already deeply engaged in conversations with the knights who represented the count of Flanders. A table with the silk treaty had been arranged. A treaty drawn up and signed on silk was considered more durable, for silk was a longer-living medium than parchment. The men stood, no chairs had been placed except the throne of Duke John, and would have been impossible with so many lords present.

After a while, a herald announced the signing of the treaty. The duke came to the table, solemnly signed, and then a thundering applause broke loose. One by one, the greatest lords of Flanders and Brabant signed after the duke. Also the Abbot of Gembloux was called forward and signed.

For Brabant signed the knights and lords Otto of Kuyc and Jehan of Kuyc, William of Huerne, Thomas of Diest, William of Wesemale who was marshal of Brabant, Jehan of Rotselaer, Jehan of Loen, Henry Berthout, Jehan of Leefdael, William of Boecstele, Jehan of Sombrefe, Louis of Diepenbeek, Diederic of Walencourt, Louis of Berlaer, Gillis of Quaderebbe, Arnold of Aelbeke, Jehan Pyliser, Jehan of Kersebeke, Herman of Os, Jehan Pulleman, Daniel of Bouchout, Henry of Boutersem, Henry of Walem, Raes van Graven, Goswin of Goetsenhoven, Ywaine of Meldert, Arnold van de Wiere, William van den Bossche, Gerard of Vorselaer, Jehan van Immersele, Colin of Vilvoorde, Jehan of Craeyenem, Jehan of Scoenhoven, Charles van de Rivieren, and Walter of Melyn.

For Flanders signed Henry of Flanders, Philip and Jehan of Axel, Simon de Mirabello, Gerard of Rasseghem, Rasse and Arnold van Gaveren, Jehan van den Gruuthuse, Roger Bryseteeste, Oliver of Poucke, William of Nevele, Gossin van den Moure, Wulfaerd of Gistel, Gerard of Raeseghem, Gerard van Outre, Jehan van Belle, Justase Passcharis, Roger of Lichtervelde, Zeger and Daniel of Drongen, Gerard of Gistel, Daniel of Rozebeke, Simon van der Maelsteden, Roger van Vaernewijc, Gerard of Moerseke, William van Straten, Jehan van Poelvoorde, Jehan van Masseminne, Rasse van Erpe, Jehan van Ayshoven, Giselbrecht van Leeuwerghem, Gerard van Masemme, Jehan van Herzele, Jehan van de Moere, Arnold Bernagen, Jehan van Huutkerke, Louis van Moerkerke, Hugh van Steelant and Jehan of Lokeren.

Their names would be mentioned in the perpetual alliance.

James van Artevelde was extremely moved when he heard the names of so many noblemen sign the alliance. He was even more moved when a few weeks later Hainault joined the same treaty with Holland and Zeeland.

I, Jehan Terhagen, had not been part of the negotiations and of the travels of James van Artevelde, the aldermen and the counsellors, but Gillis Vresele had. He had served as

counsellor to James. Gillis explained me all the details of what had been discussed, the many sessions that had been needed, and the final result. Maybe Gillis had been too much involved in the process that led to the treaty for him to grasp the full, grand meaning of the clauses. Maybe nobody involved had grasped the grandeur of what had been accomplished, but I did not doubt many would soon. So, I remained sitting, stunned, in my chair near the hearth, in front of Gillis, unable for a long time to speak, taking in the implications as far as they might go. Boudin Vresele was also present with us. He looked at me, for he too had understood what the vision of James van Artevelde was about.

‘Are you telling me, Gillis,’ I started, ‘that in less than two years James van Artevelde has not only realised unity in Ghent and made Ghent accept and follow his vision of neutrality in the conflict between the kings, evolving to outright support for Edward III, which is a world-shaking event by itself, has made after Biervliet the three major cities of Flanders accept as theirs these same views as the natural course of events, and united the people of Flanders behind his project, despite the count, and that now also he has forged an alliance of all the cities of the Low Countries together, all of them, in a pact of defence and of non-aggression? Do you realise the enormity of what has been accomplished?’

‘Well, yes, of course,’ Gillis Vresele answered, a little surprised at my sudden exclamation. I continued, ‘James van Artevelde was supposed to solve the issue of no wool coming into Ghent. Now, he has linked all the cities of the Low Countries together, meaning all the countries north of France are now allied as if they formed one sole block! Do you realise that if King Edward manages bringing something like ten to twenty thousand warriors in the field on the continent, and King Philip of Valois at the most thirty thousand, James van Artevelde can assemble an army of thirty thousand men from Flanders, twenty thousand from Brabant and thirty thousand from Hainault, Holland and Zeeland together? He has become the most formidable war leader, the man with a vision that is three times larger than a vision for Flanders, in one treaty! He has created a block so solid it cannot be attacked by any king, probably not even by the emperor! He has created the greatest force on the continent! Where will that man stop? And how has he succeeded in charming or forcing the count of Flanders, the duke of Brabant and the count of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland to agree to this scheme, despite their mutual envy?’

‘Well,’ Gillis Vresele laughed, but frowning, drawing his eyebrows up at us, ‘that is what has been written down, indeed! Like you state it, Jehan, it is a pact more formidable indeed than I had realised. Nothing, however, says that James van Artevelde will lead the three armies in the field. Who leads the armies has not been decided upon, so the war leader will be assigned by the aldermen of the cities and by the princes. James van Artevelde would be a fine leader indeed, but he will not necessarily be appointed. My guess is a knight will be! Also, do not forget we only signed a pact. The pact is parchment or silk, written for perpetuity, but the pact remains written words. Where is the soul?’

‘What soul?’ I exclaimed again.

‘Written words are promises,’ Gillis answered, ‘promises and oaths, but promises and oaths can be broken. A pact has only value as long as behind the parchment and the silk, behind the signatures and the seals, lies the will of the men who signed to bring the clauses to life, to fulfil them. Do the duke and the counts really want to realise the pact? I doubt it! The pact lends too much power to the cities for the princes to accept it wholeheartedly. The pact states the counties must work together. Do they really want that? There is much competition among the cities and among the lords. The greedy, vain princes envy each other. Maybe they think it is a good thing today to face a common enemy, probably France at this moment, and King Edward might have success, but they remain envious and suspicious of each other’s motives. They do not trust each other. I wonder whether really the duke of Brabant would be willing to join all his troops to ones of the count of Flanders and of the count of Hainault in the event of

an attack on one of the counties. The same is true for the other lords. Would the cities of Holland really send their complete militia if Flanders is attacked? That is what I believe is meant by the soul. Words are fine, cheap oaths and promises are better, but the total commitment to realise the fine ideals written down in the treaty is quite another matter!’ ‘The pact is a start, not an end,’ Gillis continued to explain. ‘The representatives of the cities of the three counties will from now on meet regularly, and that creates the opportunity to link more tightly the ties of the pact around the cities. James’s intention is to link the cities of the Low Countries closer together, to create another mind-set. Will he succeed in that? Will we succeed in that? Maybe yes, and probably, no! It seems to me our differences of opinion and our divergence of interests, sadly and egoistically local, may make empty words of the treaty and nothing more. It remains true that the strongest bond among the people is the rule of a traditional prince. It takes a prince, duke or count, to link villages and cities into one county or realm!’

‘It is nonetheless a wonderful vision, which brings hope to the younger generation,’ I insisted. ‘From a common trader, you, the Pharaïldis men, have created a visionary statesman as the Low Countries have not heard of in centuries. We are entering a new era, if only the grain has been sowed. This shall be a pact to be remembered by many people who think about the future of our lands!’

‘In that you are right,’ Gillis concluded, ‘and you are also right in stating only one man, in fact, brought the idea as close to realisation as currently possible. It was completely and only his idea, his plan. Yes, we brought a man to prominence who turned from a simple trader to a genius statesman. How long will it all last? To where still will he take us?’

We remained very pensive for quite a while after those last words of Gillis Vresele.

After the publication of the treaty of perpetual alliance between Flanders and Brabant, Edward III, king of England, signed a manifesto in Ghent as king of France on the eighth of February of 1340, declaring he too wanted to establish prosperity in Flanders, abolishing the taxes Count Louis of Nevers and King Philip had installed on merchandise, and returning for Flanders to the laws and customs of the times of his forefather, king and Saint Louis of France.

King Edward left Flanders in early March of 1340. His financial issues had worsened. He had again to loan large sums from the Florentine bankers, the Bardi, the Peruzzi and the Leopardi, and also from merchants of the Low Countries. He borrowed money from merchants of several countries, from William de la Pole in England, Anthony Bache, Matthew Dast, from merchants of the *Hanse* of Bruges, from traders of Leuven and Mechelen, and from Simon van Halen-Mirabello of Ghent. The loans were substantial. The king therefore had to promise to his creditors to return to Ghent by the feast of Saint John the Baptist. Queen Philippa remained at Ghent.

The Flemish representatives William of Steelant and Nicholas de Schotelaere sailed with the king to England. They witnessed how the king called a parliament together at Westminster on the twenty-ninth of March.

The king repeated the oaths of the three treaties he had signed in Ghent. The same oaths were taken by the bishops of Canterbury, Durham, Lincoln and London, as well as by the earls of Derby, Northampton, Warwick, Gloucester, Huntington, and Oxford. The oaths were afterwards repeated to the cities of England.

The Flemish merchants obtained the same rights as the English merchants, which displeased the traders of London. The aldermen and merchants of London complied in May, however,

exerted by the king and earls to do so, during a large assembly held in the guild-hall of London. The agreement was signed by the aldermen of London then, among which Andrew Major, John of Grantham, Roger of Depham, John Hamond, John of Resham, William of Thorneye, John of Hardyngham, William of Ilford and Adam of Bury.

Queen Philippa

James van Artevelde had made a solemn vow to Queen Philippa. He had promised to protect her. He followed up on his promise. He added special guards of Ghent around the abbey and assigned the responsibility of the guards to Captain Gelnoot van Lens. As long as King Edward resided in the Saint Bavo abbey, he did not send his guards too close to the rooms of Philippa. When the king had left, however, he urged his guards to much nearer, up and into the cloister. The abbot feebly protested, but James explained why the safety of the queen of England was important for Ghent, confessed his promise, and pleaded until the abbot agreed to the intrusion of the armed militia.

James van Artevelde also asked Gerolf Vresele, the monk among his best friends, to inquire to the lady's health and well-being. Was she served as she should, did she need anything, could James help with something? Gerolf became the go-between of James and the queen. Gerolf entertained Philippa with his stories of travels to many countries and with his erudition, in the same way as he had amused the Pharaïldis ladies of Ghent. Gerolf mentioned more serious subjects, of course, talked about religious matters, and he and the Abbot often dined with the queen and discussed with her.

James hoped thus the solitude of the Lady Philippa to be somewhat relieved, even though familiar ladies-in-waiting and knights had remained with her in Ghent.

After a while, the queen wanted to thank James van Artevelde. She invited him to visit her by a message of Gerolf Vresele. James accepted the invitation gladly. He had Queen Philippa on his conscience, regretted the rude openness with which he had addressed her at the banquet, and he felt perturbed about other matters connected to her.

James wondered why he had been so irritated and aggressive in words with Philippa. Maybe it was the kind of questions she had asked him provocatively, and the tone at which she had uttered them. James had felt humiliated at first, and maybe had he therefore also wanted to destroy her haughtiness.

He thought Philippa despised him, had made him feel inferior. She was a noblewoman and a queen! James had wanted to tear down that wall of haughtiness. Why was he, James van Artevelde, who had realised so much in life, had gained wealth and popularity, supposed to be inferior to men and women who had been born with a title to nobility, but who had done nothing of consequence with their life afterwards? He had augmented his fortune considerably, multiplied what he had inherited. He was the leader of a town and of an army, a man to whose words Flanders entire listened. Why should he be considered less than a nobleman or noblewoman of no substance? James could not bring up the consideration many other people felt and showed for anybody high-born. Had he not a right to be called noble too?

Still, he did not want to be a callous man. While he had spoken to Philippa, explained to her in stinging words how matters stood, how Flanders was wealthy and England not really so, how Flanders could muster tens of thousands of trained warriors and England not or much less, he had regretted having assaulted her so crudely, directly, so ruthlessly. Her attitude had

changed rapidly! He had been impressed by Philippa's personality, wanted to crush that haughtiness, to discover she was not a proud woman at all, he had only been piercing a superficial wall of defence, and the queen had shown to him how vulnerable she was. When he had comprehended fully Philippa's vulnerability, he had been ashamed of what he had said, to the point he dreaded meeting with her a second time. He would have to bow his head this time, but for other reasons than because she was a queen. No man could defeat him by arrogance; a woman had defeated him in an instant by showing her vulnerability!

James van Artevelde also had issues with the way his wife acted lately. He had seen her flirt with King Edward. He had thought Catherine far above flirting! She had never tried to flirt or seduce him, James, certainly not physically. They did not share rooms at night since the day of their wedding, which had been in line with their business-kind of agreement spoken out before their marriage. Catherine had been invited many times to the Saint Bavo abbey, to the court of England in Ghent. His servants had told him so. Why was that? The invitations came from Queen Philippa. Why did Philippa want to see Catherine so often? Why was he more or less shied from court?

Matters between him, James, and Catherine, had evolved suddenly and spectacularly after the large banquet offered in the honour of the king and queen. A few nights after that banquet, after James had been on travel in Brabant, far from Ghent, but had returned, Catherine had entered his room in the middle of the night. James had wanted to grab his dagger, which lay always on a table near his bed. Nobody entered his room at night! But then, he had felt a woman's fingers on his lips.

The woman whispered in the darkness, 'don't speak! It is me, Catherine. Don't wake the house!'

He had heard a rustle of clothes, and a moment later Catherine had slid into his bed, quite naked, and she had made love to him. He had waited so long for a moment like this, he had almost forgotten what to do. Now, she had guided him. His passion had been great, and he might have hurt her, but she didn't even moan once. Why had Catherine changed so much, so suddenly, towards sexual attraction?

James van Artevelde was very confused when Gerolf Vresele told him it was high time he should pay a visit to Philippa. Philippa had asked for him, not for any specific reason, but she had said she would want to thank the Sir van Artevelde and converse with him. He had used Gerolf as courier and pleader. Philippa did not seem to bear him a grudge. James agreed to see Philippa, told Gerolf he did not have much time, which was true, and asked Gerolf whether the monk and friend would accompany him.

Gerolf Vresele did not quite understand why the great James van Artevelde hesitated seeing Philippa alone, which she never was, for several ladies-in-waiting sat always with her, but he also felt a little flattered the so famous James seemed to need him and to appreciate his presence. Gerolf could introduce them properly to one another. The queen had interrogated him about James, and Gerolf had explained about James's family, talked about James's brothers and about his former wife, Gerolf's sister Agneete, and her children. Gerolf could not explain much about Catherine de Coster, for that woman had remained a closed book to him.

On an evening of the next days, when King Edward had already left Ghent, Gerolf Vresele hurried to James van Artevelde's house on the *Kalanderberg* to accompany his friend to Queen Philippa. James preferred to walk. It had been quite soft weather that day, and James needed fresh air, he said. They walked to the *kuipe*, eastwards, to the quarter of the abbey of Saint Bavo. The royal guards expected them. They ushered James and Gerolf rapidly into the

abbey and to a cosy room, finely decorated with tapestries. Queen Philippa sat at a table waiting for them, reading a heavy volume of what were Latin transcriptions of Homer's Troy. When James and Gerolf entered, she slammed the book closed with a sigh, and looked up.

Gerolf was surprised. He had expected to see a very neutral, courteous glance of the queen to James, a cold welcome, but instead he discovered a warm look of gratitude, comfort and pleasure. Gerolf had prepared a small, elegant speech of introduction.

Instead, the queen stood and went immediately up to James, taking his hands in both her hands, holding James up in order not to kneel to her. She advanced to quite close to him, and said, 'my dear Sir James, I am quite happy to see you again! I must thank you so much for what you have been doing to ensure my comfort!'

James van Artevelde remarked the soft bulge in the belly of the pregnant queen, recognising she was high pregnant and would give birth soon. He smiled softly, feeling at ease with Philippa.

He answered, 'I want no thanks, please, my lady! Guarding you is a duty. After the departure of your husband, we doubled our guards on the abbey. The Abbot allowed guards at the gates and even in the cloister. The guards are led by my dear friend, Gelnoot van Lens. He is a very loyal servant of Ghent and of your highness. He is eager to serve the queen of England. He is also a very alert man, anxious on every and slightest sign of danger. I trust he has been courteous.'

'I met him, have spoken to him, and he has been courteous indeed, very, Sir James,' the queen quickly intervened, 'but I know I have to thank you personally and especially for him and the guards. Ladies, please, will you leave us? I'd like to talk to Sir van Artevelde and Father Gerolf alone, please!'

The two ladies who sat with the queen left the room so stately James van Artevelde surmised they were a little obfuscated.

'I must scorn you, Sir James,' the queen continued while she sat down again. 'I heard you have been travelling much, but I have seen so little of you latterly!'

'I am sorry, my lady,' James replied.

He and Gerolf took a chair and came to sit in front of her. 'I have indeed been in Brabant, in Bruges, in other cities a lot, these days. Duty has called me. There is so much to do! I hope Gerolf and the stewards of Ghent have served you well.'

'They have, they have,' Philippa assured. 'How have you been?'

'I have been fine,' James continued, 'as surely my wife Catherine may have told you. Wool of the best quality is pouring into Ghent, our industry flourishes, our trade is booming, we deal increasingly with England, our people can smile and work again. Thanks to your grace, Ghent is happy once more!'

James then asked how the health of Queen Philippa was and whether her pregnancy evolved well.

'My last son, Lionel was born in November of last year in the abbey of Saint Michael of Antwerp, Sir van Artevelde, and my pregnancy of him happened to satisfaction, as does my present pregnancy. Thank you for asking. My son Lionel is already called of Antwerp because he was born in that port. He is with me, here in Ghent, he needs me. My next son, or daughter, will be called of Ghent, of Gaunt in our language!'

She laughed, 'I am to have my children in the cities of the Low Countries, it seems!'

James smiled, then he continued his series of apologies. 'I have been very busy, my lady. I had to quench all kinds of uproars in the county. I have been doing that much during the entire

year, now. The captains and aldermen have been sent to Dendermonde end of last year, to Aalst in the beginning of this year, to Oudenaarde in spring, to Deinze at the end of the summer, to Aardenburg, Assenede, Geraardsbergen, Moerkerke, Kortrijk, Eeklo and many other towns in autumn. There was another small revolt in Rupelmonde as late as October. Our cities are ever jealous of their privileges, you see, and they resist infringements of them. Yet, the largest cities also have privileges, such as exclusive rights on weaving the best cloth, their franchises. We have had to send delegates to confiscate the implements used in producing such high-quality cloth about everywhere in the county. We had to cope with serious difficulties at Oostburg, as at Poperinge and in Ieper. The trade between us and France has ceased. We depend much on France for grain, however, not vitally though, so we had some luck. We are persuading the towns of Douai, Orchies, Lille and Béthune to trade with us and to recognise King Edward as the lawful monarch. These attempts are not easy and demand much diplomacy and patience. We would also like to persuade the pope of the good reasons why we accepted Edward as our king, but Pope Benedict seems to believe we are not acting in good faith. Benedict is a Frenchman, of course. The French garrisons on our borders are very hostile for the moment and among these serve a good deal of the lords of our castellanies, men who have remained loyal to Philip de Valois. So we had to send troops as far as Cassel! We have our own worries due to the count and to Philip of Valois, and our worries demand much dedication.'

James van Artevelde paused, and then he added, 'we also sent aldermen, Simon van Merelbeke and Thomas van Vaernewijc to Paris. They talked to the count, told him his place was in Flanders, not at the French court. The count returned in October and we gave him a splendid reception. We installed a Council of Flanders to help the count in making tough decisions and to guarantee the harmony in the county. John van Steenbeke, Thomas van Vaernewijc, James van der Hoven, Master Machelien of Saint Baafs and Henry de Keyser are members for this council for Ghent, but the count preferred to flee from Flanders again end October. A little later we had to stop a revolt in Rupelmonde. The count did not return to Flanders, arriving back in Paris in December, so we appointed Simon van Halen de Mirabello as guardian or *ruwaard* of Flanders end January. Simon de Mirabello is lord of Beveren, Halle and Perwez. He is married to Elisabeth of Flanders, a daughter of Count Louis of Nevers, so he shall be accepted too by the count. The daughter of Simon is married to Yvain van Vaernewijc of Ghent. The council took up much of my time. We have constant worries to have our friendship with King Edward firmly installed, but we are receiving more favour for our policy than adversity. Still, many nobles remain *Leliaerts*, in favour of Philip of Valois, and in favour of the count, who dances by the drums of France. Until this spring, we have been explaining why King Edward declared himself king of France in the Friday Market of our town, and why we approved. We are doing all that to secure the support of Flanders for the king and queen of England, who are also the rightful king and queen of France!' 'I too am happy to hear that,' the queen nodded.

Philippa abruptly changed subjects to something that was on her mind, and that she had been wanting to breach earlier. 'I have not met your wife since the banquet, Sir James. She should call on me one of these days. How is your wife, by the way, your children?' James van Artevelde was startled, and Philippa noted his discomfiture and surprise with a benevolent smile. James understood instantly why the queen had invited him to her. She had wanted to warn him, or find out whether he, James, had sent Catherine. James regained his composure, but the smile had left his face, 'she is fine, my lady. I hope, your highness, you are doing well equally.'

‘I am,’ Philippa smiled. ‘The quantities of food the *Gentenaars* try to push in me are staggering! I have a Flemish doctor and a Flemish midwife, you know, who come to see me every other day. They definitely try to stuff me like a Roman matron! They are nice and they seem competent enough, but they forget this child is not my first. I know what to do. I know what is best for my health and how to keep it. Are you hungry?’

James admired the easy-going conversation the queen could continue, while he felt even more ashamed, angered, hurt.

Gerolf and James admitted they had not eaten yet that evening, so Philippa asked Gerolf to call in a servant. She continued to study James’s face. A little later, the small table in the room was covered with a rapid supper.

While Gerolf left the room for an instant, James stammered, ‘my lady, I truly apologise for having been rude at the banquet. I forgot my manners entirely. I’m sorry.’

‘Do not say anything further, Sir van Artevelde. I know quite well how you felt and why. Maybe I asked for rudeness. I asked for the truth in any case, and the truth you gave me. I confess I did not know what you told me. I do like men who tell me the truth.’

The queen, James and Gerolf continued their conversation at the table.

They spoke about Ghent, about the finest monuments, about the city walls, about the importance for Ghent of the two rivers Leie and Scheldt, and about the wool weavers of the town. Gerolf Vresele was constantly astonished about the familiarity of speech between Queen Philippa and James van Artevelde.

‘That man can charm anyone,’ Gerolf thought, ‘merchants, poor fullers, and kings and queens alike. Does he realise his talent?’

The three of them whispered, laughed, exclaimed, clapped their hands at jokes, and they had a good, relaxed time together.

Late in the evening, when Gerolf said it would be time soon to return to Ghent, and after Philippa had indeed expressed she was getting tired, the conversation briefly turned to the safety of the queen.

Philippa mentioned, eyes averted, ‘Sir van Artevelde, I remember you have guaranteed my safety. I constantly fear danger, not so much for myself, as for my unborn child. I appreciate your efforts and I have faith in the fine young men standing at the gates of the abbey. Most of my safety lies in the hands of the people of Ghent. I must ask you also to remain vigilant with the aldermen and the nobles of the city. Danger lurks there! Thank you for what you will do!’ James van Artevelde’s smile was put out immediately like a candle that is quenched. Was Philippa reprimanding him? He had to think about her words first, then maybe also ask her more clearly what she had meant. The queen looked meaningfully at Gerolf Vresele. He reassured the queen of his efforts everywhere, with the guards and with the political institutions of the town. Then, he and Gerolf said goodbye. James promised to be back soon.

James van Artevelde and Gerolf Vresele walked back to the *Kuipe*, to the centre of Ghent.

The men kept their silence, James still musing over the last warning of Philippa.

James suddenly turned to Gerolf Vresele, asking, ‘Gerolf, the last words of the queen worry me. They sounded like a warning, a question, and a plea. Was there a hidden meaning to your knowledge? Did I miss something?’

Gerolf Vresele sighed. ‘It was a plea, indeed. I found out a little about it. The queen has confided a little in me. I could not yet explain to you, because you had often been out of town. I also had to pry, with many questions, before she more or less confessed what she knew.’

‘Know about what? You puzzle me, Gerolf!’

‘All right. Here it is. There must be English or other spies in Ghent, people who work for England, who feel great sympathy for England. Queen Philippa holds contact with them through her doctor. He is Flemish, but he is a Hainault man, you know, who has come to live and work in Ghent a long time ago. I suspect he still remains very loyal to Hainault, to Philippa’s county and to her. Maybe the men who heard what was happening in Ghent are all men from Hainault. There must be quite a few Hainault traders in the town, and I dare say, even knights of Hainault. Anyway, it seems, and Philippa heard, that not everybody in Ghent is liking the English monarchs. Some people dislike the friendliness the current aldermen and the captains show for England. Whether people are only talking or whether a true plot is being planned, neither the queen nor I am certain of. Rumours always fly about in a town like Ghent, always of men who are dissatisfied with this or with that. Faint rumours of a plot directed against Philippa have been spread. A plot threatening Philippa’s life would of course entirely make enemies of England and Flanders, might even have King Edward attack Flanders, attack Ghent, and lose us our wool, discredit you and force Ghent back into the arms of the count and of King Philip of Valois. That is exactly what some people in Ghent would welcome!’

‘You can’t be serious,’ James exclaimed. ‘It would be an outright disaster for all of us if something happened to the queen! Who is so stupid as to think of acting against the queen of England in Ghent? What is the menace? Who is behind this? Why didn’t I hear of this much earlier?’

‘To answer in reverse order,’ Gerolf smiled wryly, ‘you haven’t heard of it because we haven’t heard of it until very recently, and you were not in Ghent. The menace comes from the usual hotheads, from the knights who are *Leliaerts*, from some of the de Gruterres, from people around the deans of the guilds who have remained *Leliaerts* at heart or who are envious of you. We have a few names, not many, and only rumours to go on, nothing definite, no proof at all. The menace seems to be of an attack on the Saint Bavo abbey, an odious act in its own right, or an assault when the queen visits something in Ghent, which would be very rare, for she refuses to leave the abbey since she has got wind of the rumours. Luckily so!’

‘This is horrendous,’ James van Artevelde shouted, fists clenched. ‘I must act immediately!’

‘No you mustn’t,’ Gerolf continued calmly, grabbing an arm of van Artevelde so that they stopped walking on. ‘Keep calm! You were not in Ghent, but I have told what I knew to Gelnoot van Lens and to William van Vaernewijc. The three van Lakes will hear what the weavers have to say, how their feelings towards the queen go, and try to pin down more names, more accurately. The de Herts also are trying to learn more. You know how the shippers are, the most eager gossipers on earth! Shippers are lonely people, who when they gather in a port, exchange all they know about Ghent, all they suspect. We must have more information, James, be certain something nasty is cooking in the pot! In the meantime, Gelnoot van Lens kicks his guards about. He now practically lives in the abbey, sleeps in his mail, and he has worked up the vigilance of his men. He smuggled more than a dozen men into the abbey. They are hiding in a hall. Nobody in Ghent but you and me know they are in the abbey. They exercise daily! At the slightest alarm, they will guard the door of the queen with their life. All those precautions have been arranged these very last days, while you were out of Ghent. Let Gelnoot and the Pharaïldis men handle this issue! If you start throwing men in prison, torturing them and executing them, you may do more harm than good. We need to preserve your popularity! You cannot be regarded as a vengeful dictator! Your popularity is the basis of your power. The basis is brittle. We talked, and decided to this plan. Let us handle this!’

‘I’m sorry, Gerolf,’ James objected bitterly, ‘but I can’t let you handle this alone. I must know what is brewing around the queen. I must have the names of the conspirators, and I must destroy the danger in the core, stop the menace to Philippa!’

‘We all want to crush that plot,’ Gerolf assured, ‘but we cannot act without being certain of the accusations. You cannot imprison and kill knights of Ghent without proof! When we have proof, then of course we must act rapidly. In the meantime, Queen Philippa is protected quite well by the men of Captain van Lens!’

‘I know. What you propose may be the right thing to do. I also will hear what my sources know about the plot. Then, I’ll strike! I will not tolerate any danger for Philippa!’

Gerolf Vresele heard James van Artevelde mention several times just the name of Philippa, not her title.

‘How familiar is James with the queen?’ Gerolf wondered. ‘Sweet Jesus! What is going in, here, between those two? Heaven forbid! We have a terribly dangerous situation on our hands in more than one way!’

Gerolf pleaded, ‘we have arrived, James. We can talk about this issue with Gillis and with Raes van Lake. They have good advice, always!’

‘I’ll do so,’ James agreed.

He entered his house, and Gerolf Vresele continued walking in his usual slow gait to his cell in the *Fremineuren* abbey.

James van Artevelde returned regularly to Queen Philippa. He spend agreeable and interesting evenings with the queen. They became good and intimate friends. James found harmony and peace with Philippa. He avoided being for long periods at his home in the *Kalanderberg*.

At the end of February, the queen announced the birth of her child was imminent. She asked James for a fine Flemish name. She told she was almost sure she wore once more a son. James thought of the main church and patron-saint of Ghent, John the Baptist, and he proposed the simple name of John. Philippa found the name appropriate, a good English name too.

John was born early March. King Edward was still in England, then. James van Artevelde acted as godfather at the baptism. He offered three kinds of expensive, high quality cloths to the queen and a beautiful, golden cup made by John de Smet, a masterpiece of craftsmanship, to the newly born prince.

That child, King Edward’s third surviving son, would later indeed be called John of Gaunt. He became the first duke of Lancaster and father of kings.

The Plot against Queen Philippa

‘All right’, Gillis Vresele said in the hall of his house. ‘We know a plot is cooking in Ghent to assassinate or abduct or do otherwise harm to Queen Philippa of England. We know, because Philippa’s spies have heard of it. Philippa’s doctor, who is a man of Hainault, has caught rumours about the plot, and reported to the queen. Philippa told my brother Gerolf and also James van Artevelde. James has promised to my brother not to intervene. I’m afraid it is up to us to find a solution, to thwart the plot. First, I find it annoying we haven’t heard of anything concerning that plot. We are quite aware, usually, of what is happening in Ghent, also the secret wheeling and dealing, so this comes as a surprise. I mean not the plot itself, because when one thinks about it, it seems quite plausible something like it was in preparation, but I mean the fact we were not in the picture at all. How does it come an obscure doctor, a foreigner to Ghent, knows more than we?’

In Gillis's hall sat his son Boudin and John de Smet, the goldsmith, married to Gillis's daughter. I, Jehan Terhagen, sat on the other side of the table. Also were present in the room Raes van Lake the younger and his brother William, as well as the fuller Pieter Denout. The last to arrive had been John de Hert and Gerolf Vresele, the monk. They were the Pharaïldis men of the second generation, to whom the older Pharaïldis men had passed this mission to foil the conspiracy. Philippa of Hainault was not to be harmed in Ghent.

'I have no idea why we haven't known about such a plot,' John de Hert shook his head. 'The van Vaernewijcs know nothing of it either!'

John de Hert was married to Beatrise van Vaernewijc, younger sister to the brothers Thomas and William van Vaernewijc, very prominent men, aldermen and captains in Ghent.

'The plot must be prepared by only a few people,' Pieter Denout conjectured, 'and we must assume it has been guarded very closely. Nothing of the secret has leaked out. A doctor visits many households, households of the wealthy. He may have picked up something from the women, or overheard conversations of men.'

'Probably,' Gillis continued pensively, 'but how then do we learn about the plot?'

'Hear from one man involved in the plot would suffice,' Raes van Lake proposed. 'If only we could catch one man, we could extract names of the other conspirators from him. But where should we look?'

'The assassination of Philippa would serve the count and the king of France. Logically, the conspirators should be followers of the count and of the Leliaerts. We must therefore seek the plotters among the knights of the town. I don't think this can be a plot of men from outside Ghent. The traitors must be *poorters*,' John de Hert suggested.

'Indeed,' Gillis agreed, 'but if even the van Vaernewijcs know of nothing, and they have many friends and acquaintances in those circles, how then can we find the conspiracy out?'

'We must all begin to ask questions to the people we know,' Raes van Lake decided. 'Without information we can do nothing. So, I propose we take five days to find out anything. Me and my brother, we can ask around in the weavers' guild. We shall have to be extremely discreet, hint we know something without drawing attention. Pieter can ask whether the fullers know anything, though I doubt a fuller has been made part of the conspiracy. John de Hert might interrogate the shippers. The shippers talk a lot, many of them are not very discreet, but I also doubt a shipper is involved. Still, they might have picked something up. John de Smet can hear among the smiths and the goldsmiths, and you, Gillis, can start asking questions to the traders and the landowners. Jehan, interrogate some of the younger knights you know in Ghent.'

'And then what? Suppose we hear of the plot, of who is in it. What do we do then?' Pieter asked.

'Then we have to find out when the plot is due, and we stop it! We can assemble sufficient men to assist us! The captains will help,' Gillis decided.

'What if we don't find out anything?' Pieter insisted.

'Gelnoot van Lens and his men guard the Saint Bavo abbey,' Gillis replied. 'Gelnoot will have to remain vigilant. We can warn an additional force of guards to keep ready. If the abbey is attacked, we must be made to know of it immediately, and our guards must intervene rapidly, helping Gelnoot's men.'

'If the abbey gets assaulted, Gelnoot will not be able to send out messengers, and his messengers if sent out may be intercepted. We must place a few spies on the lookout around the abbey, even without Gelnoot being aware of those men,' Raes van Lake proposed.

‘Fine, fine,’ Gillis nodded. ‘We have guards and people who like to help. William, can you organise all of this? We need about fifty men on guard, crossbowmen preferably, and four men constantly on watch around the abbey.’

He paused, hesitated, and then continued, ‘no, no, there shall be no attack in daylight! We have only to organise a watch from sunset to sunrise. But, William, you’ll have to organise a schedule of warning. How can a man on watch warn everybody in the fastest time? We have no time to waste when the abbey is attacked. Speed of intervention is everything! We must also distinguish friend from enemy in the night.’

‘A white hood will do,’ William retorted. ‘Our men will wear a white hood when they counter-attack.’

‘Very good,’ Gillis said. ‘I suppose that is all we can do for now. I want the watch and the guards ready and active within three days. William, I count on you. If you need some help, use Jehan. As to the information, the first to hear anything warns the others. Have a cup of wine. The cheese from Tienen is quite excellent!’

John Stocman was frightened out of his wits. He had been taken by surprise. Now, a dark linen, dirty sack was strung over his head. His arms and legs were bound, and he could feel he was lying on hard and wet planks of a boat. The floor swayed very gently. He didn’t know where he was. He could see nothing and he had been clubbed on the head, lost conscience but he knew not for how long. He had felt a cloth in his mouth, had succeeded in spitting that out after many attempts, wriggling his jaws, working with his teeth and tongue.

He then had screamed for help, very loudly, but he had heard steps approach and a rough voice ordering him immediately, ‘try that once more, John, and we’ll hit you again on the head. I hope you have a hard skull. Cry a little louder yet, and you’ll end up with a crushed skull. Be smart and keep still!’

It had not been necessary to gag his mouth again. John had kept silent. He did not doubt the ruthlessness of the men who had bound him, for he had been hit on the head twice before, and his skull was sore. He had been walking along the *Reep* in the evening. Suddenly, somebody had knocked him hard on the head. He did not remember having seen somebody around, that evening, so the man who had downed him must have hidden behind the line of trees along the *Reep*. The next thing he remembered was being lowered into a boat, and he had screamed, but then he was hit on the head again. He wondered now why he had been left alive. His money purse would have been stolen, but why had the thieves taken him? Why had they not left him behind a tree? What did they want?

John felt he was in a river-boat, for he heard water slush against wood, against the hull, and the floor on which he was lying moved very, very slowly under him. Suddenly, he felt and heard the sack over his head be ripped open. A knife was cutting an opening just at the height of his mouth. He still could not see anything. If he had been left without conscience for not too long a time, it would be dark outside, night.

A voice said, ‘well, well, John Stocman! We have to talk! We’ll be brief. You are involved in a plot against Queen Philippa of England. You are planning to assassinate the queen, to abduct her, or to harm her in some other way. We want to hear you spit out to us the names of your co-conspirators. Tell us the names, and be quick about it!’

‘I know of no conspiracy,’ John Stocman stammered. ‘You are crazy! Release me!’

‘John, John,’ the voice continued, ‘if you don’t keep your voice down, you are going to regret it! Not that it matters much, Dear John, for nobody can hear you but us. I am sensitive to shouts! I don’t like them. Now, I repeat, John, we want names!’

‘I don’t know what you are talking about,’ John stubbornly persisted in a considerably lower voice.

‘Look John,’ the voice resumed. ‘I’m going to tell you what is going to happen to you. You are going to spill to us the names of your miserable co-conspirators. You can refuse, but then we are going to lower you in the water, hands and legs bound. We are going to drown you, John! Nothing is more logical, John, for if you don’t speak, you are useless to us, and we might as well drown you. Drowning is not a nice way to leave the earth, John! However, if you talk, we promise you shall live. You shall disappear from Ghent for a while, but you’ll live. Make your choice!’

‘You shall drown me anyway after I have spoken,’ John wailed.

‘No, we won’t, John, but you’ll have to take our word for it. I repeat, make your choice!’

‘I won’t speak!’

‘Fine, John, sorry for you,’ the voice calmly said.

John felt two pair of hands heave him up from the wooden floor, and then he felt he was being hung over the railing of a boat, feet and legs in the cold water.

‘Speak up, John! Last chance!’

‘Go to hell! Help! Help!’ John screamed.

His body slid deeper in the water and John felt the wetness rise over his body. He was being lowered on ropes into the water. His head went under. He choked. John thought he was going to die, his lungs burst, he tried holding his breath, but after a short while he coughed water in. He regretted having sent his kidnappers to hell. He wanted to live! He wriggled and tore at the ropes around his hands. The ropes did not yield. John gurgled for life but swallowed more water. Then, the ropes tensed.

John was being drawn out of the water. He breathed with the gasps of desperation. He screamed, but someone touched his head.

‘That was only a foretaste of what is to come, John,’ he heard the voice mercilessly say. ‘Give us the names, John, and live! The next time you go in deeper, fellow, and we shall only get you out again when it is too late for you! Last warning!’

John Stocman was being lowered again, but he screamed in agony, ‘all right, all right! I’ll give you names!’

The ropes held John’s legs under water, and half his body, but the lowering had stopped.

The voice insisted, ‘start talking, John! Give us the right names, for if the wrong names come out of your mouth, we’ll come back for you and slit your belly first, then cut off your right hand and your right foot and geld you! We’ll not kill you, John, for that would be too nice a punishment for you, scum!’

‘All right, all right, I’ll give you the names,’ John still gasped. ‘The plot has been set up by the knights. William Bette, Gilbert de Grutere, Peter Damman. John Borluut and John van Steenbeke lead it. I am only small grit!’

‘We know you are only small grit, John Stocman. That is why we let you live. Those names are not enough. We need more. Who else?’

‘John de Roemere, John Sleepstaf and Gillis Soyssone,’ John gave.

‘Is that all?’

‘Yes it is, by God, I don’t know more names. There may be others, but I don’t know them. Oh God, they are going to kill me!’

‘No, they won’t, John dear,’ the voice comforted. ‘You see, you are going to disappear for a while. After we release you, you had better not return to Ghent too soon, or swallow something that makes you very sick for a month. Now tell us, how do they plan to attack the abbey?’

‘They will gather to a side of the *Bijloke*, an hour past sunset, then go together to the Saint Bavo abbey and overwhelm the guards.’

‘How many men?’

‘About forty. Good men! Warriors all. You shall not be able to stop them!’

The voice laughed, ‘we can stop who we want, John! Now, John, tell us when. You’d better tell us the truth, fellow, for we shall keep you until it is all over, and then either release you, or maim you as we promised. You’ll live a very miserable life after we have finished with you. Don’t tempt us!’

‘God, oh God!’

‘Speed up, John,’ the voice insisted.

‘Five days from today! Count from one to five tomorrow. On the fifth day! Oh God!’

‘We don’t need more, John. You have been very cooperative, for which we thank you. We are going to lock you up, now, for about ten days. We are very sorry, but you’ll have to survive on bread and water. We are going to take you on a voyage. You may not like that, and you’ll end up someplace far from Ghent. We’ll leave you some money, don’t worry. If what you have told us is not the truth, you’ll be a lot less of a man than you are now. This is your last chance, Stocman, to alter something to what is more of the truth. Do you have anything to add?’

‘No, damn you, I’ve told you the truth!’

‘Fine. Goodbye then, John.’

John Stocman heard the steps of two men leaving. He remained lying on the hard wood. He shifted his body so that he could breathe through his nose rather than by his mouth.

‘So, we have the names, I presume,’ Gillis Vresele said. ‘Thank you, John, for having found out about that Stocman.’

‘It was not too hard,’ John de Smet replied. ‘I asked my questions among the smiths and the goldsmiths. One of my colleagues had heard Stocman boast about something mysterious and grand he was involved in. John Stocman was a man I knew, a goldsmith too, not a very fine one, and indeed a troublemaker in the guild. It was a long shot. We may trust him to have uttered the truth. He was really frightened.’

‘What have you done with him?’ Gillis asked.

‘I put the guy in a boat,’ John de Hert laughed. ‘The boat will take him to Antwerp, and there I have arranged to get him on board of a sea-going ship. In two weeks he shall wake up somewhere near the harbour of La Rochelle in France. He will find enough money next to him to buy food for a few days, not enough to buy him an easy passage on a ship back to Flanders. He is a resourceful little fellow, however. He may lie his way aboard a ship bound for Flanders. He’ll get back!’

‘So you cannot cut him where you said you would at the time we find out he lied,’ Gillis frowned.

‘No, indeed,’ John de Smet replied. ‘We would not have had the courage to geld him, anyway. But he believed us, so we must have the truth. We have the names, the date and the hour and the number of men. What more do we need? If Stocman has lied, we can still kill him when he is back in Ghent. If you think it necessary, we can take somebody else out

among those names, but two guys who disappear right before the attack might be one too much. We can now also have them be followed!’

‘I suppose it won’t be necessary,’ Gillis judged. ‘Let’s go over that list.’

Gillis Vresele looked over the names.

‘As we thought,’ he began a little later, ‘the conspiracy is led by followers of the count and of the king. The names are familiar, men from the best families of Ghent, knights and landowners. We have John Borluut, Gilbert de Grutere, John van Steenbeke, William Bette and Peter Damman. These are patricians and not exactly friends of the van Artevelde, even if John van Steenbeke has proved himself useful during James’s rule. He is extremely ambitious, and gains in influence. He is very intelligent, ruthless, cold-headed, aims for leadership in Ghent. I am most astonished to find William Bette among those men. Bette is a no less fine name than van Vaerneuwijc, a formidable man! Those five knights deal the cards. The other four are members of the guilds, but each of them from another guild. John de Roemere is a pursemaker. I don’t know him so well, but I’ve seen him. John Sleepstaf I know, a despicable person. He is a weaver, not a man from the smaller guilds. His reputation is blemished, though he pretends to be an important man. Gillis Soyssone is a butcher, very antagonistic to James van Artevelde. All the Soyssones are, by the way. Our John Stocman is a goldsmith, and not a too smart one either, as John de Smet told. Five knights, four men of the guilds. That is a fine combination. They have about forty men, you said. Forty, that may be as few as thirty and as much as fifty. They shall assemble in the *Bijloke*. What do we do with them?’

‘We can easily bring together over one hundred reliable men from the guilds,’ Raes van Lake proposed. ‘We wait for them, attack them and kill them! Use crossbowmen!’

‘That would mean a real skirmish or a battle inside Ghent, Raes,’ William intervened. ‘It might kill our reputation as a safe city for the king of England, and prove a major scandal to the countries around us. We cannot do that! We must work in silence.’

‘Good thinking,’ Gillis Vresele praised William. ‘We cannot afford a scandal, a bloodbath in Ghent over this. We cannot shed blood over Philippa within our walls.’

‘Here is another way,’ Gerolf whispered.

The men leaned their ear to the monk.

On the fifth day after the capture of John Stocman, several figures wearing weapons slid through the streets of Ghent towards the bridges that led to the *Bijloke* in the ever-darkening evening. The men were knights, leaders of the group of would-be assassins who had been preparing an assault on the Saint Bavo abbey that night. They walked to a side of the *Bijloke* where bushes and trees grew, joining in silence a group of about thirty men who would soon run to Saint Baafs and attack the guards of captain Gelnoot van Lens. They hoped to surprise Gelnoot, break open the main gate of the abbey with axes, kill or make prisoner the sleepy guards, proceed to the cloister and to the quarters of the queen. The five knights led five small groups of warriors. The hired murderers knew what to do. Each group had a target. They ran in silence towards Saint Baafs. They made as little noise as possible, and reached the walls of the abbey. They ran to the gate.

When the five groups stood at the gate and began to hack at the wooden panels, they had a surprise. Somebody behind them whistled high. Then, tens of small burning torches were thrown from within the abbey to the groups. Two or three of the torches set fire to the clothes

of a couple of men, but those fires were rapidly extinguished. Curses and shouts were heard. The leaders called out for silence, but they were clearly confused. This assault was supposed to be a surprise on the guards of the abbey! The attackers looked to all sides, wondering what might happen. The torches just fell in the street, and then nothing. They realised they stood in the light of the flames.

A strong voice called in the eerie light of the torches. The voice came from the corner of a side street.

‘Men of Ghent, we know what you have come to do! Go and stand against the walls of the abbey, the one next to the other. What you are doing is high treason. Ghent is about to punish you severely! You are surrounded and we hold you under aim of more than fifty archers. Make the wrong move and you will be killed! Do as I say! Go to the walls!’

Tens of hooded shadows, men with white hoods on their head, moving as phantoms in the night, emerged from the side streets leading to the walls where the attackers stood. Although there was not much light, the attackers saw the men that came up to them carried crossbows. The walls and the attackers stood in the light, the counter-attackers walked in the darkness. One of the attackers tried to sneak away on the right. He was shot down instantly, two bolts protruding from his chest. Another man ran to a dark alley. He fell with a bolt in his thigh. ‘We have brought many more crossbow bolts,’ the voice shouted from out of the white hoods. ‘Just continue trying to flee. Do us a favour! We’ll love killing you!’

The group of men that had begun to assault the Saint Bavo abbey froze.

‘Throw down your weapons. Stand to the wall, back to the wall,’ the voice commanded.

There followed a hesitation in the group. Men looked at each other, then one threw his *goedendag* on the ground. The metal clattered on the stones around the abbey. In a few houses light of oil lamps or candles shone through the windows. Nobody came outside those houses, but many eyes were spying at them from behind the windows.

A second man dropped his weapon, and then the movement of falling weapons rippled through the group. They also went to stand at the walls.

‘Everybody to the walls!’ the voice commanded once more to the attackers, who were now totally discomfited.

The white hoods waited until all the attackers stood docilely with their back to the wall. Two men from the white hoods then stepped forward. In the darkness and in the flickering light of the torches, the faces of these men could not be discerned for their eyes and mouth were hidden in the shadows of their wide hoods. The two men went along the line. The second man pointed to someone, and the first hooded figure then drew that attacker from the wall, to three steps into the street. The hooded man thus collected the attackers the second man chose. When the two mysterious men had passed by all thirty of the assassins, eight men stood together in the street, the others still against the walls.

The voice then shouted, ‘all of you who are standing at the wall, turn around with your faces to the stones!’

When the attackers stood with their faces to the wall, hooded men ran forward and bound the attackers’ hands behind their back. The eight men who had been picked out did not move. Then, crossbowmen with white hoods advanced. They led the attackers off. One hooded crossbowman took four attackers and disappeared, pushing his small group of hoodlums on, in the adjoining streets. These groups vanished into the night. Silence fell at the wall of the Saint Bavo abbey.

One of the remaining attackers cried, ‘what are you going to with us, scum? Do you know who we are? We wield power beyond your imagination!’

The first of the two men who had chosen the eight then came forward again. The other counter-attackers receded in the darkness.

The hooded man said, 'we know you! We know who you are all! See, we picked you out!'

The man walked slowly past the eight men, studying them. He saw anger, haughtiness, defiance, a little fear too.

'William Bette, John van Steenbeke, Gilbert de Grutere, John Borluut, Gillis Soyszone, Peter Damman, John de Roemere, John Sleepstaf, we know you indeed! You are the leaders of this operation. You have made a scandalous attempt to break into the Saint Baafs abbey with the aim to harm Queen Philippa of England. You deserve to die for that act! You are hereby condemned to death.'

The eight men began to shout. They screamed they were member of the families of aldermen and of the best families of Ghent. They simply could not be killed.

'We are very perfectly capable, and very eager to kill you all,' the man who stood before the group said.

He walked up and down the line of frightened men, hands on his back, hood still drawn forward to hide his face. He was a young man, but a determined young man.

'Hear my words! You deserve to die, and you will die, one by one, if you try again to harm the queen. We know your names and we know your faces. If we see one of you ever within a mile from the Saint Baafs abbey, you will be killed. Some of you shall end by a dagger in the spine on a dark evening; some of you shall feel a sword thrust through your lungs; others will hear a crossbow bolt whistle from out of nowhere and bolts shall pierce your heart. We know you as the leaders of an odious, foul, traitorous attack. We shall show no mercy if you plot again. Do not think we cannot know your secrets. We have informants among you! We knew from the beginning you were planning an assault! We shall learn of a second attempt too! We have your names, we have your faces, and we know who you are! We shall not grant you a trial if you attempt another attack. You shall die first. We are going to release you, but you shall have something to remember us by. Afterwards, we want you to run for your life. If you don't run fast enough, our life shall be ended by a crossbow bolt.'

Two strong men, also hooded, came forward. They each held a whip in their hands. They whipped the first conspirator with five painful, hard strokes. The small leaden balls at the end of the whips tore clothes and flesh open. The man who stood first in the line was William Bette. He groaned under the strokes but did not scream. Then, one by one the remaining attackers were punished. Sweat trickled on their faces. Their mouths contorted in pain and hate.

When the whipping was done, the leader of the crossbowmen pointed to the other end of the street, uttering but one loud word, 'run!'

William Bette ran, and then the other men ran too. They vanished.

When all the attackers had thus been dispersed, three of the remaining white hoods went to the gate of the abbey. One of them shouted very loudly, 'Gelnoot, are you there?'

A voice shouted back, 'I am! What is happening?'

'It is done! The attack is over. You needn't fear. We are returning home, now!'

'Fine,' Gelnoot van Lens shouted from the other side of the gate. He stood with a dozen men, clad in mail and breastplates, swords in hand. He ordered his guards to their quarters.

The leader of the white hoods cried to his men, 'thank you all for having accompanied us. All is accomplished. Remember, don't talk about what you have seen! You can disperse now and go home. Be careful with the night guards!'

The crossbowmen lowered their bows, started laughing, and trotted off in small groups. They disappeared in the dark streets leading to the centre of Ghent. Five hooded men remained a while standing at the gate of Saint Baafs. Then they too walked away. They stayed together, but they didn't speak in the streets. They hurried away in silence, and from over the Leie on they walked in different streets, to different houses.

At dawn of the next day, the Pharaïldis men met in the hall of the house of John de Smet. Marie Vresele, John's wife, served them a hearty breakfast.

'Do you think we have secured them sufficiently?' John de Hert asked.

'Yes, I think so,' Gillis Vresele replied. 'They will lick their wounds. They will start looking for a traitor now, and they will be wondering how we found out about their conspiracy. They are going to miss John Stocman. That will all keep them busy for some time. Then, they will start thinking about our claiming we could murder them. Their wounds from the whips will remind them of our threat. No, they will not soon start a new attempt. They learnt their lesson.'

'Have they recognised us?' Pieter Denout asked, a little worried.

'How could they?' Gillis reassured. 'They only heard a voice in the night, the voice of Gerolf, and none of them will suspect a monk! I only pointed to the leaders, I hid my face. Most of them knew me, but it was night and I was hooded. I did not say a word! They only heard Jehan, but they don't know Jehan! My voice, they would have recognised, a couple of them, but they have never heard Jehan before. Thank you, Jehan, you played your part to perfection!'

I grinned. It was not a little thing being praised by Gillis Vresele! I had also changed my voice some, last night, making it sound deeper, warmer. I had a lot of fun with the frightened men. They did not deserve better.

'It was a pleasure, Gillis,' I nodded to him, a piece of bread and butter in my mouth.

'Oh, you darn men,' Marie Vresele exclaimed, 'did you really have to involve Jehan in all this? He is the youngest among you!'

Nobody answered. They were a little ashamed, and I glorified in the attention.

'All went well, Marie,' I waved her objections away. 'I was the only one who could never be recognised when I spoke. One or other of the plotters would have known the voices of Gillis, of the van Lakes, of John de Smet, John de Hert or Pieter Denout. We ran no unnecessary risks this way!'

Beautiful Marie chuckled.

We ate our breakfast and feasted. We laughed at how fast the finest lords of Ghent had run back home, their back hot from the whip lashes. Our guards had brought the groups of attackers separately through dark alleys and then our men vanished in the night, letting the hired hoodlums, hands still bound on their back, groping their way.

We had averted the danger of the plot against Queen Philippa, practically without bloodshed. It had been a near thing, but all went as planned. There had been some uproar in the quarter of Saint Baafs and the wildest rumours spread in the city, but it seemed nobody referred to us. The honour was mostly given to Captain Gelnoot van Lens. Even James van Artevelde never found out what had actually happened. We also did not tell him who had participated in the plot.

Chapter 3. The Time of the Offensives. Spring 1340 – Winter 1340

The French Offensive

King Edward III had returned to England on twenty February of 1340, promising to return to Flanders by Saint John the Baptist's Day in June. He left his small army in the Low Countries under the command of the earls of Suffolk and Salisbury. Edward returned to England principally to gather funds and to build reserves. He received large amounts from various sources in England, from his earls and merchants, from taxes agreed upon by parliament. His financial issues were largely but very slowly being alleviated during the following months.

King Philip VI of France followed the developments in Flanders very closely. He was worried and angered by what happened north of his kingdom. He did not seek a direct confrontation, for he feared the combined armies of England, Flanders, Brabant and Hainault would crush on him. He understood clearly what Edward III was trying to accomplish in counties that were increasingly antagonistic to his policies. He preferred limited actions and treacherous skirmishes by limited numbers of troops, very devious actions, hoping to ultimately wear down the resources of England and of the Flemish cities.

King Philip planned his first real actions in the beginning of April of 1340. On the fifth of April, the bishops of Tournai, Thérouanne and Arras pronounced the interdict over Flanders. By an old treaty, subscribed by the pope, King Philip could exert that right, although throwing the interdict over a country was the prerogative of the popes. The measure was once more not very successful, for in most of the towns one or other priest continued to celebrate mass, drawing large crowds.

The same day, the king's knights Mathieu de Trie and Godemar du Fay assembled in the town of Tournai about a thousand men-at-arms and three hundred crossbowmen. With these men they devastated the south countryside of Flanders. Their force marched on to Kortrijk, ravaging and pillaging the villages on their way, killing and raping the inhabitants. They did not try to attack Kortrijk, but on their way back they destroyed also the lands between Tournai and Oudenaarde.

In Ghent, James van Artevelde heard late of the expedition of de Trie and du Fay. He assembled the militia of the city, about five thousand men. With these, he advanced quickly to Tournai. On the Friday before Palm Sunday, he surprised the small French army in the hills of Tournai. The French raiders fled into the fortified town. Van Artevelde placed his militia camp in the villages of Chin and Ramegnies, in view of Tournai. The *Gentenaars* had brought no siege engines, and James van Artevelde feared sallies, ambushes by other French forces in his rear, so he sent couriers to the town of Ieper, asking for reinforcements. He also dispatched messages to the earls of Salisbury and Suffolk who had remained in Flanders with a small force of English men-at-arms. Salisbury, Derby and Suffolk had remained in Ghent as hostages and guarantees for the funds promised by King Edward III.

The English troops joined the troops of Ieper, which were led by the Lord Castellan Gerard of Oultre and by the aldermen James de Vroede and Nicholas de Dickebie. The aldermen of Ieper persuaded the English earls first to capture the small town of Armentières, which was defended by about three hundred crossbowmen from Genoa, hired groups of King Philip. The English and the militia of Ieper captured the town easily. Armentières had been building walls

around its town, but it had only high walls around a part of the houses. The earl of Salisbury and the aldermen pillaged and burned down Armentières.

The English earls and the aldermen of Ieper were so inebriated by their easy victory, that they thought they could in the same way make theirs the large town of Lille. They marched along the Leie, passed to the west side of the river, advancing to near the Abbey of Marquette between high hedges. They forgot to scout the environs, confident in the knowledge nobody expected them there. They were suddenly ambushed by more than five hundred French men-at-arms, among whom also many crossbowmen, a force led by the Lord of Roubaix. Utterly surprised, the militia of Ieper and the English fled in panic, offering little resistance to the determined French warriors. The enemy troops massacred the small Flemish army on the flight. One aldermen of Ieper was killed, the other taken prisoner with the earl of Salisbury, and led to the prison of Paris.

In front of Tournai, James van Artevelde received the few men that had escaped the debacle of Marquette. He considered he had not enough men to lay a proper siege to Tournai, and certainly not enough resources to capture the heavily fortified city. He therefore decided to return to Ghent with his troops, leaving a strong garrison of pike men in the Castle of Elchin, an episcopal stronghold, to observe and possibly thwart sallies of Mathieu de Trie and Godemar du Fay. The troops of King Philip were thus made prisoners inside their own, royal town. At the least movement of the French, couriers from Elchin would ride to Ghent and Ieper, and the cities' militia would march against them.

James van Artevelde marched slowly back to Ghent, at the head of his militia. Following the advice of the monk Gerolf Vresele, James asked the Flemish cities to appeal to the pope against the excommunication of Flanders. The cities' aldermen wrote they had merely received and helped the legitimate king of France, Edward III.

King Philip VI continued his insidious, limited attacks on the regions north of Picardy and Artois. An army, led by Philip's eldest son, the duke of Normandy, held frequent incursions in the county of Hainault, wanting to punish the count for his alliance with the cities of Flanders and with King Edward III. These troops raided towns, strongholds and villages of Hainault in May and at the beginning of June. Count William of Hainault protested in letters and when these were not answered, he attacked French border towns in his turn.

Count William laid siege to the town of Thun-l'Evêque, a town which lay at the junction of the Scheldt and the Scarpe. Thun was a stronghold, very important for all commerce traffic coming from Douai. The French troops of the dukes of Burgundy and Normandy, of the count of Armagnac, the king of Navarre, with captain Godemar du Fay and Thibaut de Moreuil marched then straight for Hainault. They began by plundering thirty-two villages and towns, laying waste the countryside with more than eight thousand men. The misery brought to Hainault was unheard of. They marched to Valenciennes. They scandalously ravaged the countryside of that city too, but they withdrew, frightened by sallies of the town's militia. Count William sought the aide of the duke of Brabant and of the Flemish cities in the defence of Hainault. The French then advanced also to Thun-l'Evêque, now a stronghold of William.

Ghent marched rapidly to Hainault with a force of about four thousand three hundred militiamen under James van Artevelde and his captains, the three deans of the guilds and eight aldermen. Also troops of Brabant arrived.

The French refused a battle, so both armies remained at opposite sides of the Scheldt in June, watching anxiously each other's movements. They could not cross the stream in the environs of Thun.

On the eighteenth of June, King Philip in person arrived at Thun. As the army of Hainault had withdrawn, he razed the town. A week later, he heard of the sea-battle of Sluis, feared an invasion by English troops, and withdrew also, back to France.

James van Artevelde returned to Ghent only on the fifth of July, coming from the port of Sluis.

The Sea-battle of Sluis

While France had taken the initiative of arms in Flanders and in Hainault, King Philip's largest offensive had actually been launched at sea. Philip had won a few successes with his fleet earlier on, making frequent raids onto the English ports and coastal villages. Confident in the power of his navy, Philip gathered a large fleet of war-cogs and other boats to intercept the ship of King Edward III when the king of England would return from England to Flanders. Philip had been notified of Edward's return by his spies. The French royal fleet blocked the Zwin, the bay of the harbours of Sluis and Damme, the main ports of Flanders. The hundreds of ships formed long rows in the waters between the island of Cadzand and the port of Sluis.

The French fleet was led by Hugh Quiéret, a knight of Artois, and by the constable of the king, Nicolas Béhuchet. It consisted not merely of French ships. Castille was an ally of France, and Castillian cogs with very high front and rear castles sailed with the French. Moreover, the French had captured a few English ships, the *Dionysius*, the *Christopher*, the *George* and the *Black Cogg*, and these cogs too had been manned with men-at-arms and crossbowmen. More dangerously for the English, the French admirals had hired six Mediterranean, Genoese galleys under the command of a corsair of Porto-Venere, called Barbavera, Blackbeard. Barbavera was a very experienced naval commander. His galleys were extremely manoeuvrable and quick in the open sea, as they relied as well on their oars as on their sails. The galleys were equipped with proper steel-enforced rams, stone-throwing catapults. Their oars could make the ships turn extremely quickly and then dart forward, in all weather. The Genoese galleys were redoubtable opponents.

The French fleet thus consisted of more than one hundred forty war-cogs, specifically built for the war at sea in Calais and in the ports of Normandy. Numerous ships of all sorts, barges and smaller merchant vessels, accompanied and strengthened the fleet to in all close to four hundred sails. With the French fleet were the ships of the Flemish pirates Lanisius Spoudevisch and John van Eyle. Spoudevisch especially was known to have captured out of Calais quite a few Flemish cogs on their way to Sluis. This proud fleet reached the Zwin on the eighth of June 1340, closing off the harbours of Bruges.

On the tenth of June already, King Edward III heard from a messenger sent to him by the archbishop of Canterbury, that a large French fleet had blocked the coast of Flanders. That same day, Nicholas Béhuchet disembarked a large number of men-at-arms on the island of Cadzand, in front of the Zwin. His troops burned down the hovels of Cadzand and murdered the inhabitants.

The militia of Bruges, led by John Breydel and John Schynkele had also arrived by then in a first contingent, to defend the city of Sluis. James van Artevelde was still marching south with the militia of Ghent, to assist Hainault in its struggle with France.

The men of Bruges saw the French fleet between the dunes on both sides, effectively closing the Zwin. The French ships were chained together, connected by planks and bars, to dampen the effect of the tides on the ships and the French troops. The fleet had formed a wall of boats in three squadrons, which lay one behind the other. The ships remained in place, flanked and protected by smaller boats weighed with stones. The sides of the French ships were also barricaded by wooden planks. Their mass thus formed an impregnable fort.

In the first French squadron, the front line, the admirals Quiéret and Béhuchet had placed the English captured and large cogs. The vessels in that line had cannon on board, and crossbowmen with Flemish and Picard mercenaries.

The second squadron held men from Boulogne and Dieppe.

The third squadron of the smaller ships, was manned by sailors from Normandy.

The French ships had more than twenty thousand men on board, a true invasion army, but most of these men were inexperienced with battles, many among them pressganged in the fleet. They had never participated in a battle, and certainly not in a sea-battle. Few of them knew how to swim. The smaller ships had fishermen as sailors, as well as merchant sailors. In this French army served less than one hundred and fifty knights, and only about four hundred mercenary crossbowmen. The fleet formed nevertheless an impassive sea-power.

King Edward had at first ignored the messages of Canterbury, but he also received similar warnings from his brother-in-law, the count of Guelders, attesting to the presence of an important French invasion fleet in the Zwin. Edward hastened then, ordering as many ships as possible to join him at Orwell in Suffolk. Edward could not ignore the enemy fleet. French raids had caused too much damage already in English ports, notably at Southampton. He had also never envisaged postponing his return to Flanders. He had sworn on the fourth of December of 1339 to be back in Ghent or Bruges by the feast of Saint John the Baptist, and so he would. Edward was a very determined man and a man of his word. His admiral Robert of Morley feverishly ordered all the ships that were seaworthy, could hold men-at-arms and were more or less fit to sail as war-cogs, to form an English fleet. In ten days' time, Morley assembled, checked and accepted about one hundred and sixty ships and a few tens of smaller boats.

King Edward sailed out of Orwell with his fleet on the twenty-second of June of 1340. More ships joined him at sea.

The wind had blown from the east for two weeks before the king put to sea, the wind suddenly having veered to blowing forcefully from the west.

King Edward thought it as much inconceivable he could lose a battle as that a woman would resist his charm.

King Edward III stood on board of his flag-ship, the *Thomas*, arms open and hands resting on the railing, looking at the peaceful coast of Flanders. He saw fine, long, white sandy beaches in front of low-sloping dunes overgrown with green grass. The dunes stretched endlessly to right and left. He saw no houses, but knew villages lurched beyond the dunes. His admirals and his knights were bowing over old maps, citing him the names of the villages he sailed past. Close to the king stood Sir Reginald of Cobham, Sir John Chandos and Sir Stephen

Lambkin. The king considered these men his best army leaders for battles on land. For these knights he had designed a particular campaign.

‘My knights are formidable,’ the king thought, ‘they can remain for days in coat mail and covered in plate armour from top to toe. I have to find a special assignment for them!’

Edward did not want the French army to disembark somewhere along the coast and devastate Flanders. Cobham, Chandos and Lambkin would have to go on land with a strong contingent of men-at-arms and archers, march to the village he knew to lie behind the dunes, Blankenberge, White Hills, and advance along the coast, along the dunes. Their orders were to refuse French troops to either escape on land or to invade Flanders.

Edward was worried, for he had received no messages from James van Artevelde. He was confident the militia of Flanders would join his troops on land, though.

He then turned resolutely to his two admirals, Robert of Morley and the Flemish Jehan Crabbe. He commanded them to sail on to the Zwin, to the French fleet.

Jehan Crabbe was a strange man for Edward. Former pirate, merchant, purveyor for the king, the man was ruthless, opportunistic, and like Edward, unable to imagine defeat in anything he did. Crabbe was the kind of man who was so intrepid and daring, he would sail straight into the middle of the French ships, showing no fear, and thus able to sow discomfiture, chaos and panic into the minds of the French leaders. This was the spirit Edward loved.

The English ships sailed on, eastward. Soon, behind the pastures of Saint Anne, Edward discovered from out of his *Thomas* the grand fleet of France, hundreds of masts looming at the horizon, then come into focus. He remarked three successive blocks of ships remaining tightly together, between the two land promontories of the bay of the Zwin.

Edward had been here before. He knew exactly where Sluis lay. He liked what he saw. The French had split their fleet in three parts, but one part floated behind the other. Three blocks of over a hundred ships each lay in his way. He could attack the first block with more boats than the French showed there, and defeat each squadron successively. Would the French stay in this formation? Yes, the Zwin was too narrow for the French ships to try to sail around his fleet and surround him. The French ships should have sailed to the open sea and use their superiority of numbers! The French admirals had neglected their superiority of numbers to give a sea-battle! That could only mean one thing: their confidence had wavered, they were not sure of the capabilities of their men. They feared the sea-sickness for their men; their warriors had no sea-legs! Also, thought Edward, if those ships remained lashed together in a defensive position, they cannot manoeuvre! I can chose my point of attack, ram their ships using my momentum of advance, or even sail alongside and order my archers to destroy the enemy’s will to fight. They have never seen my archers in action! I can surprise them with my archers, as I did the Scots!

Robert of Morley and Jehan Crabbe agreed with Edward, though Morley expressed caution. He was clearly impressed by how many ships the English would have to confront, and he knew too well the weaknesses of his own fleet. This would not be a small battle! Morley advised Edward not to attack, as the French were so numerous.

Edward replied, ‘Sir Robert, I have for such a long time wanted to punish the French ships that devastated our English ports! I want revenge for their acts of piracy on our coasts. We must destroy them! England and I expect no less!’

Jehan Crabbe supported Edward. How stupid could a Frenchman possibly be, he argued! The French had no idea about how a naval battle could and should be fought! They sought a land battle, a battle fought as if the English would besiege a castle, a fortified place. Well, so be it,

but that was not the way to fight at sea with entire fleets! Edward counted on his archers to gain the high hand.

‘The French have formed a fortified mass, a castle,’ Jehan Crabbe exclaimed. ‘They think that by placing their ships in a tight block, they are in a strong defensive position that cannot be assaulted. They have not the slightest notion about how ships can move and assault. They think we have to bring our ships alongside theirs and board them, fighting as if we were on land. A battle at sea is not at all like a battle on land! We can ram their ships, and sink their boats so that their troops will drown. We can also use fire on that mass! What those ships are doing, my lord, could not possibly allow us a better occasion and strategy of assault! This is our moment! We have three times less ships than the French, but they have forfeited any advantage. They simply have chosen the bad hand of cards!’

Robert Morley recognised the logic of Crabbe, but he remained cautious, ‘the battle will be terrible, my lord. The battle we have in front of us will be one of the largest ever fought at sea. The French must have over thirty thousand men on board, we not half of that, and there will be no escaping. On land, a warrior can flee. At sea, he drowns. Men-at-arms in armour will be sucked down. Few men can swim, none who wears iron can escape a gruesome fate. Before the end of the coming battle, twenty thousand or thirty thousand men, French and English, will die in the waters, here, before Sluis.’

‘I must disembark at Sluis,’ Edward replied decisively. ‘I have sworn to be back, and I shall be back. I shall not lose my honour to a French fleet. So many dead, so be it. I have not sought this battle. I also don’t want those ships to sail away and put their tens of thousands of men on land at Southampton or somewhere in the Thames estuary, without honour! My lords, we must do our work! A gruesome work it is, but it must be done! Prepare for battle. We need torches. I want the French ships ablaze, depending on the direction of the wind, and the wind blows to the land. We attack at dawn tomorrow!’

Morley and Crabbe left the *Thomas*, discussing heatedly about who would assault first and where.

King Edward slept nervously that night. He did not sleep well. He tossed and turned in his bed. Still, two hours before dawn he entered in a deep, invigorating sleep, which rested him perfectly. When his servant woke him, he was angry at first. Then, he felt fine, energetic, fresh, and calm. He had decided, so he did not worry anymore. He merely had a plan to execute. The worries fell from him.

He dressed for battle, but in light armour, in a mail hauberk and a steel breastplate, but refusing heavier armour, greaves, and all the usual steel for land battles on horse. He put on a simple bascinet helmet, for he wanted to be able to move and to see freely. Over his breastplate he drew a short silk tunic embroidered with his badge of golden lions quartered with the lilies of France. He put on gaudy, white boots, the only extravagance for the day. He ignored the protests of his servant.

Edward stepped on deck, not to revisit and revise his battle order, but to push forward. He left his sword in its scabbard and walked up the stairs to the deck of the *Thomas*, for he wanted to appear splendid, calm, determined, sure of victory and confident in the outcome.

Edward believed in simple, grand schemes for battles or war campaigns. He believed one should stick to one’s plans. For the actual assaults, he did not believe in overpowering, ever-present command of one man only, even if that man would be the king of England. He could not believe in one mass led by one sole man. He put his faith in smaller units led individually, so that each leader could decide for himself, within the plan, on how to advance and fight

best. Every man should do his duty and use his brains! He believed in the superiority of the English individual. Each man had to fight for himself. No man was to panic but for what happened to him, and him alone. Was that not how his forefathers, the Normans, had conquered the Angles and the Saxons? He had despatched his courtiers to different ships within the fleet. The earls of Pembroke, Derby, Huntingdon, Hereford, Northampton and Gloucester commanded their ships. Lord Felton, Lord Percy, Lord Bradestan, Sir Henry of Flanders, Sir John Beauchamp, and Lord Malton led groups of cogs. Edward kept with him on the *Thomas* Robert d'Artois, Walter de Manny, and Richard Stafford.

The king had therefore split his fleet in four, not three, squadrons. Each squadron was constituted of small groups of three ships, the middle ship being filled with men-at-arms, flanked and protected by two ships of archers. A fourth squadron was to be held in reserve and manned mainly with archers.

Edward had recalled the victory of Halidon hill against the Scots, where the English had waited for the Scottish armies with men-at-arms and knights on foot in the centre, archers at the flanks. He repeated his basic scheme, the scheme that had defeated Douglas and the Bruce.

On the twenty-fourth of June of the year 1340, a fine day in the Channel, sun rising in an azure blue sky, at early dawn and at low tide, King Edward III stood firmly on the high forecastle of the *Thomas*, archers around him, knights at his side, waiting for the tide to turn, for the wind to blow more strongly from the sea to inland, and for the sun to blaze high so that the enemy had all the elements of nature against them. He waited until his admirals paced impatiently up and down on their decks, wondering what the king was waiting for, and then he gave the order to attack. It was the ninth hour of the day, three o'clock in the afternoon. The battle began at the sounds of trumpets and drums. The royal fleet sailed resolutely forward, all banners high and waving proudly, moving into the Zwin, toward the French fleet, not slowly, each ship sailing rapidly on.

The king then had his first surprise. Before the English ships could reach the French front line, Edward saw the six Genoese galleys row from among the French ships, quite freely, and take position in front of the enemy. Edward surmised Barbavera must have disobeyed the French orders to remain within the mass of the fleet. He, the experienced sea leader, must have understood the only hope for his ships were in movement, in manoeuvring, in what galleys were excellent at, in speed and agility.

The first English cogs already engaged Barbavera's galleys. The galleys attacked the *Oliver*. Their springalds, large catapults, threw large stones on the deck of the cog, destroying the sail and clearing the deck of English sailors and men-at-arms. Other cogs of Edward's fleet advanced rapidly to the challenge. The English ships of the front assault were mainly smaller ships, much smaller than the larger galleys of the Genoese pirate. Nevertheless, Edward saw his own boats had the advantage of being able to release volley after volley of arrows on the men-at-arms and rowers of the galleys. Galleys soon crashed into the vulnerable sides of the English cogs, but then the English ships closed in and tried to immobilise the galleys by their sheer numbers. Hundreds of arrows decimated men on board the galleys. The Genoese ships rowed, turned and rammed. They exploited clearly the superiority of movement, and so the galleys won their sea-fight. They damaged cogs, and their men-at-arms swarmed over the cogs from unexpected angles. At least two English war-cogs were mastered rather quickly. Galleys were rowing fast, avoiding the deadly embrace of the cogs, but more and more

English war-ships sailed in. The cogs stung the galleys like the bees of a tenacious nest. The galleys turned and twisted to get clear, succeeded, and rammed yet another English ship.

Edward cursed. He was not yet losing this sea-battle, but too many of his ships had to engage the six galleys and Barbavera was making a fool of the English! Too many of the English ships were being damaged. Three English cogs sailed close to sinking! Edward also did not see his men-at-arms boarding the galleys yet, rather the contrary had happened! As he had expected, though, the galleys were being punished by his archers. Where was Jehan Crabbe and his ships? Had the Flemish former pirate no answer to the Genoese pirate's tricks? Crabbe was sailing farther to the right, however, unable to succour Morley for the moment.

The first battle of Sluis was fought extremely intensely, savagely, but it lasted only a short time. Barbavera realised he could not on his own, with six galleys, defeat the two hundred or so ships that rapidly homed on to him in a nick of time. He lost too many precious sailors to arrows. Two of his galleys now risked being overwhelmed by men-at-arms from two English cogs that had immobilised them.

Barbavera thought this battle not worth the loss. He gave a sign to his trumpeters. At the sudden sounds of the high tones of the long horns, the Genoese galleys turned, broke free, and rowed to the west, avoiding other, much slower English ships. Barbavera fled to the open sea. Jehan Crabbe, whose ships might have turned too in pursuit of the Genoese pirate, considered for a moment attacking Barbavera, but the orders of the king had been clear: attack, attack, attack the French fleet. The French fleet floated in front of him! Crabbe also knew it useless to sail after the more rapid Mediterranean vessels. Moreover, the *Thomas* continued signalling the frontal assault on the French fleet into the Zwin, as had always been the plan. The entire English fleet bore on the enemy cogs. Barbavera's galleys sailed and rowed westward, away from the Zwin.

In the late afternoon, the English war-cogs crashed into the massed, almost immobile French ships. The French admirals were still untying the chains between their boats, and having their sailors hack with axes at the planks that secured the ships together. The admirals had realised finally that in order to escape or simply to move their boats better against the English archers and the on-sailing high front beams of the English cogs, some freedom of manoeuvre was necessary. Too late! The French ships were still anchored tightly together, crammed as one block in the Zwin.

The English war-cogs rammed straight with their reinforced front beams into the French ships. While the wood crushed, broke, splintered, while the Frenchmen were being thrown to the decks under the impact, volleys of arrows flew upon the French sailors and men-at-arms from above, from the enemy castles. The English sailors used large grapnels and iron hooks on chains, which they flung on the enemy ships to moor the vessels to each other, so that their men-at-arms could board and do their horrible work.

The cogs both navies used were clumsy, broad-bellied, deep-draught ships with ugly round hulls, originally former merchant boats, upon which at both ends high structures of wood had been built, called castles, high platforms at bows and sterns. The cogs had one mast placed in the middle of the ships, on which hung one large sail. The sail propelled the ships through the waters and the English had the advantage of the wind. The war-cogs also had a crow's nest platform high on the mast, from where particularly daring archers could shoot even onto the castles of the enemy ships, and throw stones to the adversary decks. Especially dreaded by the English sailors were the Castillian cogs, which had extremely high castles. The Spanish decks were protected by high wooden embattlements.

On the French castles stood a few crossbowmen, who sent their deadly crossbow bolts onto the lower decks of the English cogs. The English archers, equally standing on the castles, sent ten arrows for each bolt on the French. With every crossbow archer hit by an arrow, the power of the French sailors to withstand the English archers diminished notably.

The English arrows, released by the longbows the English and Welsh archers had mastered, were extremely deadly at the short distances of inter-clashing ships. The arrow easily pierced mails and even steel breastplates, as well as a few inches of soft wood. The English archers had learned to be very efficient at maiming enemy men-at-arms. They won immediately from the French and Genoese crossbowmen, while the ships neared.

After the crash, the English men-at-arms boarded the French ships, shouting terrible war-cries and hacking and swinging around their weapons like madmen. The French newly recruited warriors were not at all used to such instant horror. The English discovered rapidly they had grossly over-estimated the power of the French army on board the ships. Their enemy was not trained for battle! Nobody survived on the many smaller ships the French had hoped to use to protect their larger cogs by, of which they possessed not many more than the English. The archers continued to exact a deadly toll among the French sailors. The battle was murderous. The French realised there was nowhere to flee to but the sea, but in the sea they would drown. Casualties were therefore very high, the fights dogged to the end.

Edward III noticed quite near him, how two English war-cogs sailed on to a large French war-ship. Both English ships sent relentlessly one shower of arrows after the other on the deck of the French ship. Edward remarked how many enemies fell, other men groped for shields and sought cover behind steel. This allowed the two English ships to ram the French cog in the soft side belly. Edward heard the wood crack ominously, and he knew the French ship would not survive. It would take time to sink, but it would never be able to flee deeper into the Zwin or to the open sea. The English warriors, blood-maddened, sprang already on board the enemy deck. They might simply have let their ship move backwards, but they were out for revenge and would give no quarter to the men on board the French cog. Arrows fled down when the French men-at-arms tried to form a line. The crossbowmen of the French had been silenced. Genoese bodies in the liveries with the green cup, the grail of Genoa, hung over the railings and littered the high platforms.

Edward's attention was diverted from the far battle to his own ship, which entered a group of at least six vessels that were lashed together by broken beams and the splintered wood of a huge mast. An English cog had rammed a French ship, its front castle bearing over the French deck. A French cog moved to alongside an English ship, and French men-at-arms swarmed over the English ship, but the French immediately lost many men to arrows. A Castillian cog then rammed the English boat, but it was attacked in its turn by two smaller English ships. From Edward's flagship, the *Thomas*, archers also shot to left and right, while the royal cog advanced more slowly to the mêlée. Edward saw how, not far from where he stood, men-at-arms continued jumping over the railing of a French ship. His *Thomas* bumped into a French war-cog, but then his ship rammed a Castillian war-cog. Edward's knights and warriors streamed aboard the Spanish ship. Edward admired his men, who threw themselves courageously into the dangerous mass of French sailors waiting for them. A regular fight, a skirmish, a small battle ensued between the English men-at-arms and the French survivors on the Castillian cog. A line of English warriors formed, and the battle raged on board the Spanish ship. Edward's archers continued to release arrows into the French rear rows of men-at-arms. Then, they directed their gaze again to the high Castillian castles. These reached

many feet higher than the English castles, so the Castillian crossbowmen could send bolts onto the English sailors and men-at-arms.

One of the enemy archers must have remarked the gaudily dressed knight with the white boots on board of the *Thomas*, for he sent one of his last bolts on the figure. King Edward was moving constantly, so the bolt merely grazed his leg, tearing open a large flesh wound. The wound was deep, the king's blood flowed over his white leather boots, colouring them red. Edward fell on one knee, and he felt dizzy from the loss of blood. A knight jumped to the king and wound white linen on the king's stockings to stem the blood. The wound did not stop Edward from urging his men-at-arms forward, on board the Castillian cog. He stood, even though he had to strain his mind and body, for he could not afford now his fleet to be without its leader.

The English had to use small ladders to climb onto the Spanish ship, but they succeeded in sending about ten armoured warriors on board of the enemy deck, where they wreaked havoc among the French men-at-arms. The English used war axes and maces to swing with large power and ward off the Castillian seamen, who surged to them with pikes and swords. More English men-at-arms jumped on the deck, including a few knights of King Edward's court, and Edward then also arrived. It was good, he thought, for the men to see their king in battle. The English group launched its attack to kill. They gave no quarter. They fought with wild energy, knowing that how faster they fought, the faster the battle would be over. Edward wielded his long sword. He hacked in on the French and Spanish men-at-arms, parried another sword, thrust his weapon deep in a belly under a breastplate, saw from a corner of his eye a devilishly quick enemy sword aim at his eyes, but being slashed down at the last moment by an English axe. Edward realised he was being protected, and maybe he had expected no less. He too protected his men. Edward stepped over the body of his slain enemy, who lay groaning, hands on his belly, on deck. He advanced, oblivious of the pain in his leg wound. Edward was a fine sword-fighter! He swung his weapon with great force and with unyielding energy, grabbed a shield that had been discarded on deck to divert the last crossbow bolts, and he reached the wooden stairs that led upwards to the formidable rear castle of the Castillian ship.

At that moment, King Edward heard terrible screams on his left side. His attention was temporarily drawn to another English ship. He saw the unlucky cog being rammed by two French war-ships. An enormous boom had been heard, which had drawn Edward's attention, then a terrible crash and the sound of splintered wood piercing the air, and he saw a heavy black cloud of smoke drift away from one of the French ships. Edward realised a cannon had shot and torn away the wooden planks below or at the water line of the English ship. The English cog began to take water. Slowly, it slid obliquely down. Then, Edward remarked with horror among the sailors and archers on deck several finely dressed ladies stream from below decks to the surface of the ship. Two of them were covered with blood, probably the blood of seamen, for the ladies screamed high in terror. The archers on deck of the English cog continued to send arrows onto the French cogs, no doubt killing so many sailors and enemies no Frenchmen dared board their wounded enemy. The English cog sank, however, very rapidly. It sank deep into the sea on one side, so that the ladies, among whom he distinguished very young ones, beautiful ones too, slid in the water and disappeared under the dark waves. These ladies had accompanied the English fleet to visit Queen Philippa. They would never see the queen! The ladies shrieked in their dead-throngs when they fell in the water, disappeared, floated back up for a few frightening moments, and then were dragged under definitely when their heavy robes got soaked with sea-water.

‘What a shame,’ Edward thought, and then the idea crossed his mind that he should have a second look at cannon, arms he had neglected and not considered very useful in battle. Cannon might become interesting as armament on board of ships.

Edward had witnessed the spectacular drowning of his wife’s ladies-in-waiting but for a few moments. His knights had not looked at the horrible scene of the ladies’ drowning. They had run up the stairs to the Castillian castle. Edward followed his men-at-arms, to help clear the wooden structure of enemy crossbowmen. When he arrived on the platform, high above the waters, so high he felt uncomfortable on the slippery planks, his men were already fighting with five Genoese men who had dropped their crossbows and fought with short swords. They were no match for the iron-studded maces of the English knights. Edward also lashed out, wounding an enemy at the arm with a mighty stroke of his sword. That man then did something that utterly astonished King Edward.

The man staggered backwards, dropped his sword, and sprang overboard. Edward looked after him, saw the man completely turn in the free air, drop into the sea. How that man hoped to swim and survive with a heavy hauberk of iron mail on him, Edward could not comprehend. He also had not the time to muse over the feat, for another Genoese sword thrust at him viciously. Edward parried it at the last moment, and lashed out with his dagger he held now in his other hand, slicing the man’s belly through a short mail coat. Edward knew this feat would be told over campfires among his men. The Genoese fighter seemed surprised at the sudden wound, screamed, giving Edward that one moment of grace he needed to bring his sword back up, turn and backslash, and slice through the man’s gullet in an upward swing. Blood sprouted on Edward, but he had already sidestepped, to find himself in a battle that had ended. Three Genoese crossbowmen lay dead on the platform. One other man had preferred to jump overboard instead of being killed by an English axe.

Edward’s companions cheered, but the king shouted commands, ‘send archers up the other castle! Secure the ship! Men-at-arms down, clear the other castle and the deck. Return to the *Thomas*! More archers with me!’

King Edward forgot his ship and looked at how the sea-battle fared. He could not see far, for he stood on the *Thomas* in a mass of entangled ships, friends and enemies together. Chaotic fighting was going on aboard many cogs. Men-at-arms fought on decks, English archers shot arrows still, and man-to-man duels were being fought between English and French men-at-arms. The din of the sea-battle was overwhelming. Edward heard the clanking of the weapons, the cries of the wounded, the war-shouts of the men-at-arms, the curses of the wounded, the crashing of wood on wood and of steel on steel. Trumpets still called and drums announced death. Many French sailors tried to escape from the tens of arrows that pierced the air. Many sailors jumped overboard. Far behind the mêlée, heavy smoke rose up from burning ships. Edward saw with great satisfaction how the wind blew the flames farther into the Zwin, not onto his ships but onto the rest of the massed French boats.

At least ten ships hung side to side around the *Thomas*. Edward’s flagship could not sail on without the French ships being defeated, won or sunk. Edward could not but remark with evident and cruel satisfaction how his archers forced a real massacre on the French sailors and warriors. How was the battle faring farther on?

Edward ran from the Castillian cog back to his ship. While he climbed and then jumped on deck, he noticed how the water between the vessels was littered with corpses. A few sailors tried to swim, but they would soon drown. It was true there was no escaping from a sea-battle! When he landed on the English deck, a stab of pain surged from his leg to his brain. He had to

kneel again and rest one hand on the wooden floor, but he limped to the front castle of the *Thomas*, grimacing with pain, followed by his knights.

Edward's surgeon had remarked the king's grimace and the blood on the king's boots, the blood-soaked linen higher. He came to the king with new, clean linen, knelt to Edward while the king was shouting orders, cut a part of the white leather of the king's boots, cleaned the blood from the wound, placed the two parts of the flesh tightly together, and then bound new linen tightly around the leg. He fastened the linen correctly. A squire came running with other royal boots, simple brown ones, but the boy was shot in the back by a crossbow bolt. Edward picked up the boots, closed the squire's eyes, undid his fancy boots and put on his new brown boots, hiding behind the railing.

Edward then stood and continued to shout, 'unhook us from that ship to the right! Turn the sail! Draw the rudder! Push us away from that cog on the left!'

The knights who stood on the castle understood the king wanted to sail out of this chaos to inspect the rest of the fleet. Some of them ran on deck, others screamed more commands to the English sailors. It took the most part of an hour, but then the *Thomas* sailed free from enemy cogs. Edward ordered to advance parallel to the sea-battle.

Everywhere, as far as Edward could see, English cogs were engaged against French and Castillian ships. The English fleet had mainly attacked the left flank of the French ships, leaving the rest of the enemy ships paralysed, unable to participate in the onslaught. The English could concentrate their ships and overwhelm individual French war-cogs. A few of the French cogs were burning like giant torches, and the wind drove the flames onto other enemy ships. On all English castles, archers relentlessly harassed the French decks. Edward remarked the archers let loose more slowly than he liked. Maybe the archers were tired after so many hours of battle, maybe they were short of arrows and picked their targets now with more accuracy. Each arrow found its target, in the unprotected flesh of a French sailor or in arms, legs and faces of armoured men-at-arms. In this sea-battle too, his archers had won the day, Edward noted. From many French ships, ships assailed or burning, he saw tens of men jumping into the boiling water, where other French sailors already thrashed, trying to escape the deadly arrows. Where could they swim to? The shore was too far off, no English ship would help them aboard. They would die, at the best succeed in grabbing floating debris and hope to hold on until the wood was brought ashore. There, the Flemish would despatch of them swiftly and cruelly. It was far past noon, the sea-battle had raged for more than three hours, and continued unabatedly.

An English war-cog slid along the king's *Thomas* and a knight shouted a message from the other castle.

Walter de Manny reported to King Edward, 'Hugh Quiéret, the French admiral, is dead! We fought him. He got wounded. We killed him.'

Cheers went up from the knights of the *Thomas*. Later, King Edward would hear that Quiéret had actually wanted to surrender after having been badly wounded, but the English knights had instantly beheaded him.

King Edward III also saw that the large English cogs that had been captured on English coasts but been manned with French sailors and French warriors, placed in the front of the French fleet, proudly showed the English royal banners. Edward's men-at-arms had reconquered the ships! They now advanced together with other English ships deep into the French massed lines. This massing together of French ships had proved disastrous for the French navy.

Flames of fire sprang from one French ship to the other. More and more French ships left the formation and tried sailing into the Zwin, to Sluis, using the strong evening winds that had augmented in violence and gusted in the sails.

Edward remarked another happy development. Tens of Flemish ships, smaller boats and larger merchantmen, had sailed out of Sluis and attacked the French fleet in the rear. The French ships were surrounded and had no escape route left. If up to now the French sailors had fought more or less on equal terms in the waters, though disadvantaged in their battles by the pitiless English archers, their vulnerability at sea now became obvious. The Flemish were excellent sailors. They assailed the French cogs. Edward counted about two hundred Flemish ships had joined the battle.

An hour or so later, one of these Flemish ships brought to the *Thomas* the battered corpse of the French admiral Béhuchet. Béhuchet exercised general command of the French fleet. It was he, mainly, who had refused to leave the anchorage in the Zwin, as Barbavera had suggested. Edward had the corpse of the admiral be strung on the yardarm of the *Thomas*. Edward hoped the gruesome sight of their leader would throw the French even more in panic.

Dusk set in, but the battle still raged. Edward sailed along the battle, but he did not order his *Thomas* anymore into the chaos. He had commands shouted and advice procured where necessary, but he thought the battle was won and almost over. The most courageous French captains fought on, but the less courageous ones roamed aimlessly in the waters, forming no organised phalanx to confront the English. One by one, the French crews were being devastated by arrows, then massacred by the boarding men-at-arms. More and more French sailors and warriors left their ships to find desperate death in the cold waters of the Zwin. The second line of the French squadrons fled in panic at the sight of their admiral at the yardarm of the *Thomas*. They offered little resistance. The light of the burning ships formed an eerie background for the battling fleets. The killing continued.

The hardest battle was then given to board and capture the large French war-cog the *Saint-Jacques* of Dieppe. The crew of the *Saint-Jacques* fought into the darkness of the evening, until the French men-at-arms were killed all. The earl of Huntingdon finally captured the *Saint-Jacques*, and when he placed the corpses of the dead warriors and sailors one next to the others, French and English, he counted four hundred dead men on this ship alone.

Night fell over the Zwin. Thirty enemy ships from the third French squadron slipped by the English fleet and sailed off, westward, back to France. These ships were led by a Flemish former pirate called Spoudevisch. They sailed out of the French line of Normandy merchantmen that had already attempted to break out but had failed in their earlier endeavours to flee. In the late night, Edward allowed Jehan Crabbe to pursue these with a considerable number of English cogs, but he did not urge Crabbe to be over-zealous. Edward did not care much for so few enemy ships escaping the French disaster.

The other enemy cogs had been captured or destroyed, or were still burning. The fleet of King Edward captured more than one hundred sixty ships at Sluis. Thousands of French and Castillian and Genoese sea-men died, drowned, were burned. Few were taken prisoner. From the men that did reach the shore, most were massacred by the Flemish patrols on the coast or by the English men-at-arms Edward had disembarked at Blankenberge.

The Flemish inhabitants of the coast later humorously told that so many Frenchmen had drowned in the sea and spilled their blood, that had God granted to the fish of Sluis the ability to talk, they would certainly have spoken French after having feasted on so much French blood.

After King Edward III had gained his great victory of the sea-battle of Sluis on the eve of Saint John's Day, he remained for a while on board of his ship, the *Thomas*, to recover from the wound in his thigh. Many Flemish delegations came to see him there, and politeness demanded he received them gallantly. Especially magistrates of Bruges were allowed to the presence of the king. The aldermen congratulated Edward, and he thanked them for their precious help. Edward asked them about James van Artevelde, for he was a little disappointed his friend hadn't rushed to visit him or support him with the militia of Ghent, but the Flemish delegates told him James was still in Hainault, at Thun-l'Évêcque, helping Count William of Hainault against the French troops. The news satisfied the king.

Edward made his fleet enter the port, and then, accompanied by many lords of England and Flanders, he went on foot from Sluis on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Aardenburg. The King heard holy mass and dined at Aardenburg. He was henceforth much admired in Flanders for his religious zeal, for he had walked the long way despite his wound.

James van Artevelde travelled from Hainault to Sluis, where he arrived on the thirtieth of June. He congratulated King Edward with his magnificent victory. Edward embraced James as if he had met a brother. A little later, Queen Philippa also travelled from Ghent to the *Thomas*. She brought with her the child Lionel of Antwerp and the latest son of the king, the baby John.

James van Artevelde returned to Ghent a week later, to prepare for the king's stay in the Saint Bavo abbey at Ghent.

In Paris, nobody dared announce the disaster of the lost French fleet to King Philip VI. Then, only his jester ventured to sing, 'oh the cowardly English! None of them dared to follow our French men when they jumped overboard in the sea!'

King Philip understood and mourned.

The Siege of Tournai

In the harbour of Sluis, James van Artevelde and King Edward discussed the situation in Hainault where James came from. They talked on board the royal cog *Thomas*. James van Artevelde had not come alone. With him came William van Vaerneuwijc, Simon Ser Thomaes and William de Bomere of Ghent. James reiterated to the king the wish to capture Lille and Douai, for Ghent expected Edward to disembark his army and march it into France.

King Edward was again very low on money, though. He had to wait. He sent messages to England, demanding his counsellors to bring the promised funds to him, but the money was late in arriving. King Edward then travelled to Ghent, where the aldermen feasted him and offered him presents, some of which had been provided by James van Artevelde. King Edward proposed to assemble a huge army consisting of the troops of his allies on the continent. He wanted one hundred thousand men from his allies, an army he would lead himself as king of France and Vicar of the Empire. Another fifty thousand men, would be led by Robert of Artois, his confident. Robert of Artois desired ardently to capture the region of Artois in the coastal lands of northern France.

After his skirmishes with French forces, victorious, Count William of Hainault returned to Valenciennes with his lords. He organised a feast there, in his castle, to honour the victory of King Edward at Sluis, as well as his expedition against France in which he had secured his frontiers. A large banquet was dressed in the hall of the castle.

The day after the banquet, the vassals staged a triumphal parade in the market place of Valenciennes. The lords had the warriors of their campaign march before the aldermen of the cities and the lords of the castellanies of Hainault. Count William of Hainault and Duke John of Brabant pronounced short speeches.

When the count and the duke had finished speaking, the people thought no more speeches would be presented. James van Artevelde jumped unannounced to the dais and signalled with open arms for silence in the place. He too, though no nobleman, wanted to say a few words on behalf of the Flemish cities.

‘Duke, count, lords and friends,’ James shouted, ‘I am no nobleman of high birth, but nevertheless the leader of the Flemish army that has accompanied Count William. I wanted to emphasize the importance of our concerted actions. We have been able to scare away the army of France, and thus we could guarantee our independence, our freedoms and our lives. We accomplished this by working together as one unit. The treaties we concluded for Hainault, Holland, Zeeland, Brabant and Flanders, prove that together we can withstand the powers of far greater countries. By assembling our armies, we have demonstrated how we can match France in force. We have delivered a great lesson to the larger countries around us. Indeed, we are anything but the weak followers of the monarchs who think we are an inferior people! By showing our force, we have commanded the French king into respect for us. France shall think twice before attacking our counties anew. Showing our united force has ensured peace in our lands! This is the road we have to walk in the future: remain separate and inviolable counties, but make sure by acting in unison the people around us respect us and leave us to live in peace so that we can exercise our trades and our crafts, live honourably and feed our families. I honour the duke and count to have made this possible for the well-being of our people.’

James van Artevelde received a fine applause in the market place of Valenciennes. He remarked nevertheless the dark anger on the face of Duke John. This was to have been a triumphal parade staged by the noblemen of the county! Duke John disapproved of the growing power of the militia of the cities. A man like James van Artevelde presented a danger for his authority.

James van Artevelde continued, ‘we have recognised King Edward of England as king of France in the Friday Market of Ghent. We believe King Edward not to be a perfidious monarch, as Philip of Valois no doubt is, but to be an honourable man who feels sympathy for his subjects and cares for their well-being. This king has signed our charters of freedoms and acknowledged our wishes to remain proud Flemish, proud men of Brabant and proud men of Hainault. King Edward recognises the frontiers of our counties. We all know the rights of King Edward to the throne of France to be solid and legitimate. Edward should be king of France according to the laws of our countries. His great victory in the harbour of Sluis, where he defeated a French fleet of four hundred ships and an army of thirty thousand men, prove God granted him his benevolent aid. The king’s victory in the face of overwhelming odds, cannot have been won but by the grace of God. What more proof do we need for calling King Edward our legitimate king of France?’

A second, thundering applause accompanied James van Artevelde’s speech, and now even the duke and the count smiled, seemed to agree, and applauded with shouts of enthusiasm.

The lords who were allied to King Edward were called together at Vilvoorde at the beginning of July of 1340. Duke John of Brabant, Count William of Hainault, Reginald count of Guelders, Margrave William of Jülich, Lewis of Brandenburg, son of Emperor Lewis, and many more lords gathered at Vilvoorde in conference with delegates from the main towns of Brabant, Flanders and Hainault. The lords and delegates agreed with the plans of King Edward to lay siege to Tournai and capture the stronghold of Philip of Valois. From there, they might strike with their troops further southwards to Compiègne. The Flemish militia could capture Lille and Douai.

King Philip pillaged in the meantime the valley around Cassel. His army advanced to Saint-Venant. He was accompanied by the magnificent nobles of his court: the kings of Bohemia and Navarra, the dukes of Normandy, Burgundy, Brittany, Lorraine and Athens, the counts of Savoie, Alençon, Armagnac, Boulogne, Dreux, Aumale, Blois, Sancerre, Roussy and a large number of lesser lords. He set up camp at Bouvines, where Count Louis de Nevers of Flanders joined him with a troop of knights and lords of his castellanies.

Robert of Artois managed to gather about ten thousand warriors, still a considerable army. He found them waiting for him at Cassel. These were the militiamen of several Flemish towns. He brought a group of English archers. Under his leadership, this army marched west, burning everything in their wake. They burned Arques and marched against Saint-Omer. Saint-Omer was held but a strong garrison of French men-at-arms and of Flemish Leliaert knights. Duke Eudes of Burgundy, the count of Armagnac and the lords of Bergen and Diksmuide roamed in the environs. They marched rapidly on to meet a section of Robert d'Artois' Flemish army.

The Flemish battalion occupied a strong defensive position. When the count of Armagnac remarked how strongly his enemy had invested the landscape, he turned his troops away and wanted to leave the field. The Flemish interpreted the retreat as a rout, so they ran out in some disorder, in pursuit of the French. Armagnac turned, however, and he attacked the Flemish centre, which he defeated. The Flemish battalion fled from the field!

While this happened, Robert of Artois ran towards the gates of Saint-Omer at the exact moment the troops of the duke of Burgundy drew into the town. Robert tried to enter the town with the rear guard of the French army. Burgundy closed the gates at the nose of Robert. The count of Armagnac then suddenly arrived at Saint-Omer too, and he fought Robert of Artois' rather disorderly troops. The French realised they could not win against the larger army of Artois, so they withdrew, which also Robert d'Artois did. Not much had been accomplished by either side.

Robert of Artois led his troops to Tournai. King Edward advanced to that town with a very strong force, including James van Artevelde's troops of more than five thousand warriors. Van Artevelde and King Edward, who had brought about four thousand men, arrived on the twenty-third of July at Chin near Tournai.

King Philip of France kept the gross of his army deep in the north of France. King Edward challenged Philip of Valois in a personal duel, or to have one hundred men of each army decide on the conflict between the kings. Philip received the message of the challenge, but he answered in fine words it had been addressed to Philip of Valois and not to the king of France, so not intended for him.

In the late summer of 1340, in the first month of autumn, Catherine de Coster's pregnancy came to conclusion. James van Artevelde had known his wife was pregnant since the spring of the year, but he had scarcely occupied himself with the fact. He had done nothing special to remind himself he might be a father in the foreseeable future once more. The relations with his wife remained cordial, friendly, polite, but warmer feelings were not involved. James received a message while he was in the camp of Ghent at the siege of Tournai. His wife Catherine was on the verge of giving birth. Not wanting to seem heartless to his officers, he rode back to Ghent to pass a few days at Catherine's side.

The birth of James's son went well on that eighteenth of July 1340, though not without excruciating pain for Catherine. James heard her scream for an entire night. Only in the morning the midwives brought him a son, enveloped in white linen. James van Artevelde took the baby in his arms, as was expected of him, but even he was surprised at how little any tender emotions welled up in his heart. He could not help it. The child left him indifferent. His love had been Agneete, and he had felt real love for Agneete's children. They were and remained the joy of his days. James van Artevelde quickly ceded the baby to its wet-nurse, and then went to see his wife.

Catherine lay pale and exhausted in a bed that had been refreshed. She felt very tired, sank away in a large cushion, but she smiled. She was proud when the midwife placed the new-born child next to her.

'He looks like a fine boy,' James van Artevelde stammered.

'He is, isn't he?' Catherine agreed, smiling weakly. 'He is fine in body and members. We checked! He is in good health, too! He screamed right away. I am going to breast-feed him, not just leaving that to the wet-nurse.'

'Fine, fine!' James van Artevelde added.

He did not know what more to say.

'I can only stay for a few days,' he apologised rapidly. 'We are laying a siege to Tournai. I have to go back!'

'Yes, you have,' Catherine replied. 'Can you be present at the baptism? I'll be up in two more days.'

'That will be fine,' James replied. 'I can stay for three more days. How do you want the boy to be called?'

'That is for the father to decide,' Catherine eyed him.

James paused, hesitated, seemed to want to sneer something, bowed his head, and then whispered, 'we might call him Philip.'

'Philip, after Philippa?' Catherine asked, some bitterness and sarcasm in her voice.

'Yes, after Philippa,' van Artevelde insisted. 'I was godfather to Queen Philippa's son, to John. I thought of asking her to be the child's godmother.'

'So be it,' Catherine sighed, leaning back into the bed, watching the window, eyes glistening with tears.

'I wonder what shall become of my children,' James wondered.

Catherine turned back to James. 'I would like this child to be dedicated to God,' she whispered, 'he might become a priest, an abbot or a bishop maybe!'

'Why not,' James smiled. 'We might have one more priest in the family.'

‘Oh, James,’ Catherine pleaded suddenly, ‘could we not forget our old pact and learn to love each other a little? I have been wrong. I underestimated you. You are strong, decisive, a man of sweeping vision. I did not recognise those forces in you.’

‘We might give that a try, might we not?’ James said, but the smile left his face. He stood up from the bed and left the room.

Philip van Artevelde was baptised in the church of the Saint Baaf’s abbey of Ghent. Philippa of Hainault, queen of England, was present at the baptism, having accepted being young Philip’s godmother.

Right after the baptism, James van Artevelde rode back to Tournai, feelings churning his mind. He rode as fast as he could, the over fifty officers and guards that rode with him wondering what devil had taken possession of their Captain.

The siege of Tournai by the English and the Flemish armies consequently began on the thirty-first of July 1340. The English army occupied the south-west terrains of Tournai, under the leadership of the king and of Robert of Artois. The Flemish troops, including those that had previously been led by Artois, remained with James van Artevelde. Van Artevelde had brought eighteen hundred weavers of Ghent, twelve hundred fullers, and two thousand one hundred men-at-arms from the smaller guilds. The Captain-in-chief of Ghent placed his troops on the banks of the Scheldt.

Count William of Hainault and John of Hainault arrived then also, and positioned their men to the right of the English. Between Hainault and the Flemish camped already the duke of Guelders, the margrave of Jülich, the counts of Berg and Salm, the Lord of Valkenburg, and their German troops. When the duke of Brabant arrived, he led his army to between the right of the count of Hainault and the German contingents. All the allies of King Edward had thus gathered to start their campaign.

Inside Tournai camped the troops of Godemar du Fay and of Count Raoul of Eu, constable of France. These had sneaked into the city a week earlier. With the men of Burgundy, they counted somewhat more than five thousand men-at-arms and two thousand five hundred horsemen. Crucial in any siege of a town were the provisions gathered before the town was blocked. From those provisions depended how many weeks or months a garrison could hold the city before being starved. The French lords expelled all the people who could not defend the city, hoping to spare food for a very long siege.

At that time, on the fourteenth of September, the annual procession of Our Lady was to take place in Tournai. It was the custom of Ghent to delegate four Dominican friars with presents to this procession. This year, the Dominicans were turned back because Flanders had been excommunicated.

Tournai was attacked from various sides. No attacks were so vigorously fought as the ones launched by James van Artevelde with his dreaded militia of Flanders. The Flemish assembled a small fleet of river-boats. The idea to assault the town by water had been proposed by John de Hert, who had accompanied James van Artevelde on the campaign to Tournai. De Hert had remarked the defences on the Scheldt were not very strong, the barrages weak. De Hert installed battering-rams on some of the boats to break the barbican and the defences of the Scheldt. James van Artevelde ordered men armed with huge battle-axes in the first boats.

For the first time also, he used guns on the boats. The Flemish called the guns *ribauden*. They consisted of a set of tubes held together by iron loops. In each tube sat a long, harpoon-like, solid iron arrow. When the powder was set to fire, a huge explosion could be heard. The heavy arrows were propelled from the tubes with great power, and thrown far. The master of the guns was called Peter van Vullaere. He needed three carpenters and five other men to handle the engines. The Ribauden had been transported from Ghent to Tournai loaded on five sturdy chariots, which had been protected and also made into war chariots by long irons in the form of swords protruding from their sides. After the battle of Tournai, these engines were sent back to Ghent on the boats.

When the Flemish boats were seen to sail straight at Tournai, the garrison prepared a counter-attack in no time. They sallied in vessels to intercept the Flemish boats before these reached the city barrages, and an obstinate fight ensued in the river. The small battle continued on the banks of the Scheldt. The knights of Tournai sallied also on land to turn away the Flemish militia. The armies fought on foot, on horseback, and in the boats. The French garrison fought with so much ardour, so ferociously, that the Flemish could not breach the defences of the town. James van Artevelde, who had arrived at Tournai in a very bad, taciturn, awful, irritated mood, was more angry and frustrated than ever by the thwarted efforts of his army. He began now to doubt, once more, his invincibility as an army leader! Had he failed, or were others responsible for the failure?

The battle lasted the entire day. James van Artevelde fought in the first ranks on land. He could not avoid losing over a hundred men in the pitched battle. One of the Flemish ships burned and had to be abandoned. The Flemish militia withdrew in the evening, darkness obliging. The men were very tired. The garrison of Tournai must have lost as many men-at-arms, but they had repulsed the Flemish assault over the Scheldt.

Several concerted assaults were launched by the English and Flemish troops against the walls of Tournai, but all the assaults were repulsed, with great loss of human lives for the attackers. The guards of Tournai threw heavy stones down the ladders of the assailers, and burning oil on the battering rams. Crossbowmen killed many attackers before they even reached the walls. These men were harassed by English archers, but even the archers could not stop the garrison of the town from warding off the attackers.

The siege lasted. Count William of Hainault left the siege for a while, besieging and assaulting Saint-Amand, and capturing the small town. The men of Hainault plundered Saint-Amand and slaughtered the inhabitants. They did the same with Orchies, Seclin and Marchiennes. Hainault also pillaged Lille. These terrible punishments were perpetrated in vengeance for the ravages caused a few months earlier in Hainault by King Philip's troops.

Despite the provocations, King Philip never advanced his army to Tournai. He feared a battle against the major forces of King Edward. Philip held his troops back between Lens and Aras. He advanced excruciatingly slowly towards Tournai, but stopped safely behind the marshes of the river Marcq.

It became clear to the besiegers that Tournai was very strongly defended. The contingent of troops inside could hold the strong walls of the town and fend off any major assault. Tournai could only be starved to surrender, but waiting for that might take a very long time!

Defenders and besiegers both experienced irksome issues. The defenders saw their ample provisions dwindle. Among the besiegers, constituted of various armies, dissents and envy became exacerbated with time.

The troops of the duke of Brabant were eager to return home. They had not really suffered from France as much as Flanders and Hainault. King Philip stirred up trouble in the cities of Brabant, so that small revolts erupted, which Duke John would have to deal with on his return. King Philip paid large sums of money in the Brabant cities, inciting the militia of the towns of Brabant to return home. Duke John also disliked James van Artevelde, the man and what he represented. Van Artevelde had succeeded in transferring the English wool staple from Antwerp, a Brabant port, to Bruges in Flanders, so that Brabant lost the lucrative income of taxes and trade in wool. Duke John also watched with dubious interest how van Artevelde was rendering impotent the power of the count of Flanders to the benefit of the cities. Duke John was the enemy of Count Louis de Nevers, but he did not want the example of van Artevelde repeated in Brabant!

Duke John realised King Edward's finances were at a historical low again, and that came to him as a very great disappointment, for he had hoped on more money, large sums, from the king. Edward might have to return to England after a very long and therefore expensive siege of Tournai, exposing Brabant to the wrath of King Philip, a not so pretty prospect. The worried duke became reluctant to support King Edward's ambitions with much zeal. Edward back in England, Brabant left on its own, the French king attacking Brabant, Duke John wanted to be able to negotiate with King Philip, arguing he had been at Tournai but had not wished to accomplish much, rather thwarting the efforts of the English king and the Flemish cities.

James van Artevelde felt bitterness against Duke John of Brabant. The Flemish captains accused Brabant of inactivity, of treason, of helping Tournai by smuggling vast quantities of food into the town. Whether true or not, these allegations and resentments waited to explode. The outburst arrived during a discussion over the siege in the tent of King Edward.

King Edward one day of September called the army leaders to him to consider the state of the besiegers and to look for reasons for the lack of success of the attacks. The lords arrived in splendid attire of expensive mails, steel breastplates and tunics in Edward's tent. They all stood around a campaign table, looking at a parchment with drawing of the defences of the town.

'We have been keeping the town of Tournai under siege for almost ten weeks, now,' Edward began. 'We have had no success. The walls are high and strong, well-defended, and we have no powerful siege engines worth to mention. Attacks with scaling ladders have failed. We have not been able to starve the city to surrender so far, although the provisions inside must be diminishing rapidly. Tournai, obviously, has filled her granaries and the inhabitants must have gathered much livestock. We also seem not to succeed in stopping the entry of illicit provisions into the town. What can we do to alleviate this situation and to yet capture the city?'

'We have tried several times to break the defences of the town, my lord,' James van Artevelde replied as first to speak. 'The Flemish militia have assaulted the walls several times, on land and on the river. As you mentioned, my lord, we have met no success. Without larger siege engines, siege towers and the like, Tournai remains invincible. Its garrison is constituted of veteran men-at-arms, very efficient in throwing back our assaults, but equally unable to sally. It seems to me it is only a matter of time, despite the contraband, for the city defenders to be starving. Building huge siege engines may take more time than the city can hold out, so we

have a dilemma of choice. The city may oppose us for another month, maybe two months, but such a long siege puts a formidable strain on our own resources. I can inspire the army of Flanders to stay here for another month, two months at the most. Then, our militiamen must return home! I would like to add that if all the armies had shown together the zeal the Flemish and the English troops have applied, then Tournai might have been exhausted earlier. When my militiamen attacked, we have been alone to attack. Concerted assaults on all sides of the town at the same time might have succeeded at one or other point. We, Flemish, have usually attacked alone!

‘What do you mean by these insulting words?’ Duke John of Brabant exclaimed. ‘Are you accusing us of not wanting or not daring to fight? Are you accusing us of being cowards?’ ‘The Flemish troops have attacked and attacked again,’ James van Artevelde insisted, facing Duke John. ‘The same cannot be said of the army of Brabant! How many times have the troops of Brabant launched a full-scale assault? Not one time! Brabant has been lingering, resting its men in their beds. I doubt indeed the willingness of Brabant to fight. We must all together assault and assault again, and by doing so demonstrate our determination to finish once and for all with the town. Only in view of such determination shall Tournai’s will to resist us waver. With only one army attacking, Tournai brings all its men to that point of the defences and mocks us, believing our desire for battle is meagre. They fend us off, claim one victory more each time, and this provides them new hope, each time.’

A knight of Brabant who served on Duke John’s staff of war advisors, chided James van Artevelde violently. The man felt insulted.

He shouted, ‘who are you to criticise the acts of noblemen of such high birth as Duke John? You are no knight, you are merely a commoner, a trader, a merchant! You should respectfully allow dukes and counts and knights to speak in this council and you should stand in the back, listening to your betters, and wait until you are addressed! What do you know of warfare? Only knights are trained for battle. The brain of a commoner is not suited for decisions of war and battle. Yield your command to men who know how to fight, and do not act stupidly in useless assaults, which of course all failed. You have no right to insult noblemen! Your words show the insolence of people who forget they were lowly born, the insolence that seems to be accepted these days and that originates in the towns. Traders and craftsmen know nothing of war and battle! Keep your peace, van Artevelde, listen respectfully to your betters who have been chosen by God for this business, or shut up and return to Ghent. Leave command in the hands of competent knights!’

These words were spat out so contemptuously, that James van Artevelde turned red with anger in his face. Hot blood soared through his body, and he felt the insults as so many daggers of disdain and hatred striking his chest.

James drew his sword, shouting, ‘defend your life, you perfidious fool! You insulted the leader of an army! I shall teach you who knows best how to fight, the knight or the *poorter*!’ The Brabantine knight drew his sword on James van Artevelde and jumped forward, but James used the instant chaos of moving men to step aside, ducking, avoiding the impetuous thrust of the knight’s sword, and piercing from the side the knight’s mail hauberk. James drove the point of his sword in the knight’s ribs, upwards, to half the length of steel, into the man’s lungs. When James withdrew his weapon, blood sprouted in King Edward’s tent. The knight abandoned fight, deadly wounded, placed his two hands to stop the blood, but the blood continued to pour through his fingers. He had to drop his word, and blood gurgled in his mouth. The knight of Brabant fell heavily to the ground, moaning.

The lords who were present in the tent grabbed James van Artevelde, preventing him to slice at the knight's head. James could not charge a second time, but he also did not need to strike anew, for the Brabantine knight convulsed and choked in his own blood.

The lords in the tent had witnessed the terrible scene in dismay. Duke John hurried out of the royal tent. King Edward sprang after the duke, outside, and began to parley with him, fearing the troops of Brabant might leave the siege after this incident.

James van Artevelde remained a while in the royal tent, seething, and standing over the body of the dying knight, watching with wild eyes. He then remarked disapproval on the faces of the noblemen. They stood as if transfixed by the horror of the killing. Killing a man in the king's tent was considered very bad manners! It was not courteous, but the men recognised insults to honour had to be revenged, so they did not draw their swords. James's mind was still veiled by anger and revenge. He had been placed so high in authority by so many men of Flanders he could not accept the disdain from someone he considered if not a coward or a traitor, at least a scandalous hypocrite. Brabant had arrived with a considerable army, but not drawn a sword except for its own interests. On the other hand, his Flemish militia had been abandoned. His men had lost many comrades in extremely hard and bloody battles. Van Artevelde saw the corpses of the dead Flemish warriors in his mind. He was outraged. The rage of not gaining immediate success at Tournai, the frustration of not succeeding in submitting the town, the humiliation in his own home with his wife Catherine and her child, had been building up in his mind for weeks and had now found an outlet in the killing of the Brabantine knight.

If the noblemen of the court of King Edward were horrified by a killing in the royal tent, they might accompany him, James van Artevelde of Ghent, to have a look at the butchery that the French warriors had caused among the Flemish during the assaults! James had his belly full of incompetent, haughty knights who pretended to have all knowledge of battle and who had all rights, merely because they were high-born. High birth did not preclude idiocy, James had wanted to cry. He realised suddenly how much he had been loathed by the nobles. James refrained from saying more and in his turn he walked with firm, long steps out of the tent, back to his own camp. Two English guards already entered the tent of the king, grabbed the corpse and drew it outside. Van Artevelde almost bumped into King Edward and Duke John of Brabant, who were still discussing with broad gestures and strong words, eyes pleading in the one and obsessive anger in the other.

Duke John of Brabant remained docilely with the English, the German and the Flemish army at Tournai, but he did not engage with more energy than before in the siege. A week after the killing of one of his knights, another incident racked the relations between him and James van Artevelde.

A piper of the army of Brabant was called Herman de Boughere, a man originating from Stokheim in the county of Loon. One day this man, accompanied by a few friends, went to see a catapult that threw heavy stones into the town of Courtrai. The engine had no lasting effect on the morale of the defenders, but it was still a spectacular view to see the powerful machine hurl heavy stones high into the air, over the walls of the city. While Herman and his friends gaily walked along the quiet walls of Tournai, they played a happy tune on their instruments. A piper who had stood guard high above on the embattlements, repeated the tune Herman had initiated. The enemy piper showed his face and gave signs to Herman to approach. The two musicians began a conversation, and more musicians of Tournai came on the walls, asking questions about the army of the besiegers.

Three English guards who passed by found the conduct of Herman quite suspicious. They thought the conversations and signs might be the communication of spies or contrabands. They took Herman with them, to be interrogated by their commander. The commander indeed interrogated Herman, considered the piper more suspect than the man told them, and he ordered to have the piper be tortured.

At that moment, three Flemish men-at-arms appeared in the command tent of the English guards. They claimed the traitor for their troops. The English commander preferred the piper off his hands. He was glad someone else would solve the case, and he feared the ferocious, dark-looking Flemish warriors. He did not want trouble with the Flemish militia. The English commander therefore gladly handed over Herman de Boughere to the Flemings. These brought the man to a small tent set up near the one of their supreme commander, James van Artevelde.

Later in the evening, the Flemish guards pushed poor Herman to the tent used for meetings of the aldermen of Ghent. In that tent waited James van Artevelde, leaning on a long cane. James asked the frightened Herman what he had been doing in the city of Tournai. Herman replied he had never been inside the town. James then told him Herman had better confess what he had been conspiring with the enemy, but Herman repeated always the same: he had nothing to confess.

The Flemish guards then tore off the tunic and shirt of the piper of Brabant, bound his hands on his back, pushed him to a beam of the tent and tightly bound the man with ropes. They tore a piece of cloth from the piper's shirt, soaked that in water, placed the cloth on his face, and put a piece of wood in his mouth so that his lips remained open. Then they poured pails of water into the man. They almost choked him with a rope around his neck and constrained his chest with ropes. The water the man had to swallow could not leave, so the man choked very slowly, very distressfully. He felt himself die.

James van Artevelde harassed the piper, ordering him to confess the Lord William van Duvenoorde, the Lord of Oosterhout, of whom some of the Flemish commanders had said that nobleman might be a spy of France, had sent the piper into Tournai to communicate with musical tones from outside the walls. James told several times during the subsequent tortures, which lasted a long time, that if the man confessed he had acted under orders of Lord William, he would be freed. He had only to move his head to confess. Herman feared for his life, finally shook his head in fear of death, horrified by the choking process. The torture stopped.

Van Artevelde later demanded of the piper to repeat his confession to a delegation of aldermen of the Flemish cities. Before this could take place, Herman succeeded in escaping from the Flemish camp. He reported how he had been tortured mercilessly by friendly troops, and what he had been forced to confess, to Duke John of Brabant and to Lord William, who was a vassal of Duke John. The Brabant aldermen soon heard of the story, and they were horrified! They sent letters to their colleagues of the Flemish cities, protesting against the deeds of James van Artevelde. They demanded repair for the pains endured by a free man of Brabant.

After this second incident with the Flemish militia, Duke John of Brabant showed even less incentive to help actively in the siege of Tournai. The duke of Guelders and the margrave of Jülich wavered equally in their determination. They felt the siege was going nowhere, and they too learned of King Edward's financial difficulties. They did not think the English army would stay long in front of Tournai.

The finances of King Edward had indeed reached a disastrous, ultimate low. The situation inside Tournai might have reached a desperate point, but the besieging troops had terrible

issues of their own. Philip of Valois of course continued intriguing in Flanders, Brabant and Hainault.

The Truce of Esplechin

On the twenty-sixth of August, Pope Benedict XII sent two emissaries, William Amicus and William of Norwich, to the belligerent parties. He proposed to the king of France and the king of England to stop their hostilities. Philip of Valois agreed, promising the restitution of the Duchy of Guyenne to King Edward, but keeping his rights as suzerain of France. He argued Edward to realise his allies were not to be trusted. The pope reproached Edward had made an alliance with Emperor Lewis the Bavarian, who had been excommunicated!

The first negotiations between Philip of Valois and Edward of England, who had then still James van Artevelde as his trusted counsellor at his side, fared badly.

Then, a new person intervened, the abbess of a convent not far from Tournai, the abbess of Fontenelle. This abbess was Jeanne, dowager countess of Hainault, sister to Philip of Valois and mother-in-law of King Edward. The lords of the Low Countries supported her pleading. Jeanne proposed to King Philip to send new negotiators to King Edward, instead of marching with his army to Tournai and give battle, a battle in which thousands would die.

King Edward, whose financial situation was becoming so catastrophic he saw no way out of the mess, realised he would not be able to keep the siege of Tournai up for many days more. He asked for negotiations to put a temporary end to the war.

The two kings, much against their will, for very different reasons, agreed to open negotiations at the site of Esplechin, southwest of Tournai, negotiations to be held among their delegates.

When James van Artevelde heard the kings would start negotiations at the town of Esplechin, he was privately hurt he had not been invited immediately to participate in the talks. He jumped on his horse and rode to King Edward. The Flemish army camped still in the environs of Tournai.

He arrived in the tent of the king, burst in, and found the king with his counsellors and also with the dowager countess of Hainault, the abbess of Fontenelle, of whom James had heard she had been exerting considerable influence on the king.

James had been announced in the tent. King Edward asked him immediately what he had wanted to say.

James stated calmly, 'my lord, I have heard of on-going negotiations between your highness and Philip of Valois. The delegations of the cities of Flanders have not yet been invited. Take care, I beg you, for what kind of arrangements might be concluded with Philip of Valois! If we, the Flemish cities, are not included in the arrangements, our militia shall not leave one step from here. We shall starve Tournai out and take it. We definitely hold you to the oaths sworn to us.'

The dowager countess of Hainault intervened before Edward could answer, with an argument James had by then heard often enough not to react with boiling anger.

The abbess exclaimed haughtily, 'God forbid that the noble blood of Christians should be spilt for the words of a commoner!'

James van Artevelde did not react to the insult as he would have done with a knight. He ignored the remark and continued to look at who was important in the tent, the king.

Edward took James's words in consideration.

He replied, 'Sir van Artevelde, do not worry! I shall not sign any treaty that does not take into account the wishes of my good allied cities of Flanders.'

James van Artevelde thanked the king and left the tent rapidly. He did not want to hear further invectives of the countess.

James van Artevelde remained the most inflexible in the negotiations of Esplechin. He could not return to Ghent empty-handed! Ghent and the other large cities had spent considerable sums in the campaign. He could not return without tangible results.

Philip of Valois proposed therefore to offer much to the Flemish. He agreed to annul the clauses in the Treaty of Athis-sur-Orge by which the king of France had the right to excommunicate Flanders, and to place the county under the interdict. Count Louis of Nevers supported Jeanne of Hainault in this proposal, and Philip yielded. The French king promised to hand over to the Flemings at Tournai all letters, bulls and procurations containing references to the possibility of pronouncing the interdict on Flanders, and he promised to have all these clauses to be annulled by the following Sunday of Laetare.

The lords involved met at the church of Esplechin, and signed a treaty on the twenty-fifth of September.

The Treaty of Esplechin stipulated a truce was to be kept between the belligerent parties from September 1340 on to the sunrise after the day of Saint John the Baptist of the twenty-fourth of June of 1341.

In this truce, all hostilities were to cease in Gascony and Guyenne from the twentieth day after the start of the agreement. The places that had still to be invested in this war were to be held during the truce by fourteen men, seven from each side. Both parties accepted not to appeal for the intervention of the pope in their conflict. During the truce, commerce would continue unhindered. Captives and prisoners were to be freed upon the oath they would return to captivity on the last day of the truce.

King Philip signed another document, declaring he renounced for himself and his heirs the right to excommunicate the Flemish and pronounce the interdict over Flanders. The current interdict was to be raised by the first of October. King Philip promised to provide the cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper with copies of the letters that ratified the convention.

The men banished from Flanders could not return to their country, under pain of forfeiting all their possessions in Flanders. The Flemish knights who had followed Count Louis de Nevers to Bouvines and the French army, thus were not allowed to return to Flanders! The concessions of Philip of Valois to the Flemish militia were substantial. James van Artevelde would not have to return to Ghent with entirely empty hands.

Philip of Valois had to surrender all the strongholds he had captured from the duke of Brabant and from the count of Hainault.

With the Treaty and Truce of Esplechin ended a totally useless campaign of King Edward III. This was also the case for the Flemish towns, for King Philip and for all the parties involved. The population in the north of France and in the south of Brabant, Flanders and Hainault had suffered beyond description.

Duke John of Brabant hurried home, heart and mind bursting for revenge. John of Hainault informed him of the traitors who had fomented revolt behind his back, undermining the morale of his troops. The duke beheaded a few men, banished others, and imprisoned more.

James van Artevelde returned to Flanders, to Ghent. He explained what he had accomplished at Tournai to his townspeople.

On the seventh of October, Ghent received the new charters Philip of Valois had signed for Flanders. Count Louis of Nevers also returned to Flanders, accompanying for a while James van Artevelde. He wrote a letter in which he forgave all the grievances he might have felt against the Flemings. He promised forthwith to govern the county in good understanding with the main towns.

King Edward III equally returned to Flanders. He talked with James van Artevelde about his financial difficulties, for he did not receive much money from England. James van Artevelde and the delegates of Flanders consented to a new loan to the king. James van Artevelde told Edward not to worry too much about the ministers in England.

'Flanders is rich enough to satisfy your needs, my lord,' James consoled and boasted. The counsellors of King Edward agreed, but they also told the king to take caution with van Artevelde. One day, van Artevelde might be abandoned by the Flemish and maybe be killed by them.

King Edward, laden with debts in the Low Countries, constantly harassed by his numerous creditors in Ghent, wanted to return to England. The wealthy poorters of Brabant from whom he had loaned enormous sums made the king even promise on fourteen November of 1340 to return to Brussels at a place they designated to him, to pay his debts there, and remain in the place until he had done so. King Edward left surreptitiously, many said he fled, took his wife and children with him to Sluis, and then sailed back to England. Edward and Philippa secretly embarked on their ship and sailed from Sluis to London, where they arrived in the middle of the night.

The covert departure of King Edward angered and saddened James van Artevelde, who had found a real friend and tender confident in the queen.

When the militia of Flanders returned from Tournai, they stopped at the town of Oudenaarde, telling the aldermen there they would only return home after they were paid for their service during the siege. This money had to come from Edward III, who was broke. At the end of September therefore, a delegation constituted of three aldermen of Ghent, William Yoons the dean of the lesser guilds and John de Meerseman, member of the Council of Flanders, were sent to England to negotiate with the king, and receive the promised funds. The militiamen then returned to their respective towns, glad to be paid.

On the eighteenth of November of 1340, King Edward addressed a letter to his allies in Flanders, explain his sudden departure from the county. He thanked the leaders of the good cities and told he had to put his affairs in England in good order to serve his allies better. In December of 1340, Ghent sent John de Coster, the brother of Catherine van Artevelde, and John de Lokerne to King Edward to explain how much the king's departure had saddened the city.

Edward repeated he had been obliged to return home to put order to matters in England, and to punish disloyal lords. The king indeed arrested a number of prominent merchants on account of their frauds and because they had refused him the wool he needed, and he scorned his counsellors for not having served him well in the English parliament. He raised additional taxes on wool, ameliorated the collection of the taxes, and allowed for better assessments of how much wool each county was to deliver to him. Still, Edward could not gather enough funds nor enough bales of wool to pay his creditors, notably Simon van Halen-Mirabello of Ghent. Nevertheless, painstakingly, very painstakingly, the king began paying back William of Hainault and the margrave of Jülich.

Edward had not lied to John de Coster. He wanted to punish the man he considered to be the chief villain for his tax issues, the Chancellor John Stratford, archbishop of Canterbury. Edward claimed Stratford had deliberately withheld money from him. He also insinuated the archbishop had adulterous aims towards Queen Philippa. The archbishop fled, managed to excite many lords of parliament against King Edward, so that the king ultimately had to reconcile with Stratford and reinstate him in his functions. His message had nevertheless been heard, and was heeded.

The Pharaïldis Council

The Pharaïldis men, as was their custom, did not walk together in group to their meeting place. They arrived by family, separately, in twos and threes. Arnout de Hert, the shipper, had called to hold a council, which was to happen in a large shack of his shipyard on the *Lieve* Canal, not far north of the *Betsgravenbrug*.

Arnout had expanded his craft. He not only commanded a fleet of river-boats now, and a number of sea-going vessels, he also constructed ships, as yet still only river-boats, in a shipyard on the *Lieve* in Ghent.

Arnout cleared for the meeting a minor hall from ships. Two boats stood outside. He had turned a *pleite* over, and placed chairs along its hull. This particular boat had a very flat bottom, as it was in use for transporting peat over the marshy rivers of northern Flanders, from the towns of Axel and Assenede. It could be used as a large, improvised table, even though the men would have to bow forward to take their cups of wine. The Pharaïldis men, some quite aging and grey-haired, other portly, indeed preferred their sweet white wine over beer or ale.

Of the Vresele family came the family head, Gillis, forty-seven years old, as well as his brother, the monk Gerolf, of fifty-five. Boudin Vresele, twenty-four, had been invited for the first time. I, Jehan Terhagen, was twenty-one, but I had already participated at councils before. I walked with Boudin.

The goldsmith family of the de Smet were represented by Wouter, sixty and totally white of hair and beard, with his son John, thirty now, one of my best friends.

Raes van Lake, sixty but still vigorous, loud-mouthed but very wise, brought his sons Raes the Younger, thirty, and William, twenty-nine, the formidable brothers who had fought with John de Smet in the battles of Cassel and Biervliet. Raes and William had real courage and daring. They were also reputed *lakensniders*, traders in cloth, as was their father.

The van Lakes did not come alone. Raes the Elder walked with his friend and partner John Denout, the fuller, fifty-six. The van Lake sons respectfully followed their father with Pieter Denout, son of John, thirty-seven years old.

Arnout de Hert, sixty-one and therefore the oldest member of the Pharaïldis group, presided the family council. He welcomed the men as they boastfully entered his yard. With Arnout stood his son, John, forty-three, who equally warmly greeted the others.

In that year of 1340, the Pharaïldis group counted in all fourteen men. It was expected the older men would in a few years, maybe sooner, leave the council to the second and third generation, but for the moment the patriarchs Arnout de Hert, John Denout, Raes van Lake the Elder and Wouter de Smet were still powerful men, their advice, vision and wisdom appreciated. These were the leading men of the group, with Gillis Vresele, who was usually their spokesman, and James van Artevelde. James had not been invited because he would be the main subject of the discussions.

The Pharaïldis group was constituted of men exclusively, but all knew that behind each man lurked a wife or a mother. The women did not discuss business ventures, but they had their way, a powerful say, in all matters of money, power and policies. Nobody under-estimated the wisdom of the Mutaert women, married to the Vresele and the de Smet patriarchs, even though Juris Vresele had died many years ago and Mergriet, Juris's wife, lay currently dying in her bed. Also the Scivaels sisters wielded power, married to the heads of the Denout and the de Hert families. Everybody knew these women plotted together with Zwane Bentijn, wife of Raes van Lake the Elder. Formidable daughters too had been born in the Pharaïldis families, and these controlled their husbands. They had inter-married with boys from the other families. The outsider woman was Beatrise van Vaernewijc, married to John de Hert. She was a van Vaernewijc, a noble lady of probably the greatest name of Ghent, but a nice, intelligent woman, friends to many other women in the Pharaïldis families, and highly respected. Beatrise formed their link to the best, knightly families of Ghent.

Arnout de Hert bade everybody to sit at the table. He poured wine in the cups himself, left jugs on the table. When everybody was seated, he introduced the council. 'Friends,' he started, cup of wine in hand and smiling broadly, 'the year has been good to us. We hope for a soft, dry winter. I asked you to meet to have a talk about the latest events that took place in Ghent and in Flanders. We have enjoyed now two exceptional years of trade and of crafts in our town. We are getting wealthy and we see no end to our prosperity. We are building up reserves and yet expanding our ventures.

We must thank in the first place our friend and partner James van Artevelde and his family for that prosperity. James has given us back our wool and secured our freedoms, free commerce in the Low Countries and in England. It is time to review James's actions. We know all how much good that man has accomplished. Maybe we should also consider the negative aspects of his deeds, and assess how much he still works according to our advice. We have been successful because we trained our minds by council meetings, such as the current one, to think far ahead and not to give in to our instantaneous impulses. We must talk rationally about what the future holds in stock, now that James van Artevelde is virtually controlling the county. Raes, my friend, what is your opinion concerning the latest events?'

Raes van Lake remained seated. He drained his cup, poured wine, and then said, 'I believe James van Artevelde has not only fully delivered what we thought he might accomplish with our help. He went a lot further, and that is what we have to think about. James got us wool, ensured a neutrality pact that centred Flanders between France and England, allowing us peace and trade. That was fine, and James could have stopped when this had been realised more than a year ago. He continued to consolidate the pacts, and without his continued efforts, the pacts would have probably been torn up and discarded by the count and the king.

But James also continued much further, realising dreams we do not necessarily share. He speaks and acts, the equal of counts, dukes and kings. He forces treaties upon them, using the military power of the militia of the Flemish cities. He helped King Edward of England in forging coalitions that span the Low Countries. Beyond neutrality, he now fully supports Edward against the count of Flanders and against the king of France, who we believe is still Philip of Valois, whatever Edward says to the contrary.

James van Artevelde has become a revolutionary! He has formed of Flanders a kind of republic with him at its head, ignoring count and king. Where must that lead us to? Can one man alone thus overturn the natural order of our government, traditions of centuries of hegemony by a king and a count?’

Gillis Vresele continued at this point. ‘That is indeed the crux of the matter! Is James van Artevelde strong enough to resist the forces of centuries of rule by our feudal lords? If he is not alone, how many men support him? I’ll give you my opinion! I believe he has advanced too far. I don’t think he can hold out in the end against contrary, conservative forces in our society. He has no successor to his reign, for I doubt anybody among the aldermen and other leaders of our town is willing or able to continue what he has done. He remains a lonely figure, a man thrust by us like a star in the firmament of leaders of our countries, but not a man on a planet that will shine forever. As long as he shines, we have order, we have neutrality in the conflict between the kings although that neutrality is dwindling because the count and King Philip do not really accept the neutrality, and we have wool. When the light will begin to faint, we may return to the old rule and who knows to what disasters. We should think further, beyond James van Artevelde. When he loses power, or relents power, how can we still retain our wool and our grain, wool from England and grain from France, and how can we keep our freedoms?’

‘That is the real issue we should concentrate our thinking on,’ Wouter de Smet interjected. ‘Sure, James brought us salvation. Without him, we would have starved. He was the only man capable to pull us out of the catastrophe of the lack of wool. I am not forgetting we all agreed to support Edward, king of England, in his claims to the throne of England rather than Philip of Valois. We hoped that through Edward, we could maul Count Louis of Nevers. In openly supporting King Edward of England, however, we exposed Ghent and Flanders to severe dangers. The latest events prove clearly Edward is not up to his ambitions, yet we are now squarely in Edward’s camp. Edward is courageous enough, but he lacks the means for realising his claims. Like a trader who dreams of ventures, of grand deals, Edward lacks the money for his projects. His finances lie in shambles. He is deeply in debt and owes money to about everybody in our lands and to his Florentine bankers who have money to spare but also demand very high interests. I don’t think Edward will return soon to the continent with a new army. The English parliament will have to grant him enormous sums to emerge out of the swamp of his debts, and then to finance new campaigns for the conquest of France. That may well take many years, five years or more. In the meantime, nobody in the Low Countries who is opposed to Philip of Valois should expect substantial help from Edward. The pressure of Philip of Valois and of his crony, Count Louis of Nevers, will increase. Flanders, Brabant, Hainault, will be pressed between hammer and anvil. We may be left to ourselves without a leader figure. James van Artevelde cannot really be such a figure, for he is not a nobleman, and the dukes, counts and other lords only recognise the authority of another man like them. Without leader, a charismatic one or an effective one, each of the lords of the Low Countries shall follow his own ways, his own interests, meaning the one will betray the other to whoever will yield the most power and the most money, and that will be Philip of France! That means we must revise our policy once more! How can we get out of the mess? We have

largely abandoned our neutrality policy, and we must recognise taking that path may have been a mistake. King Edward is not nearly as powerful as we surmised.'

'James van Artevelde will never be the leader of the Low Countries, however much he seems to aim at such a function,' John Denout agreed. 'I doubt even he will remain for long the leader of Ghent. He does not seem to realise it yet, but his position in Ghent has considerably weakened! The campaign to Tournai with Edward of England has miserably failed to accomplish anything, at great cost of lives and funds to Ghent. It ended in no more than a temporary truce, whereas the ambitions of Edward were to conquer the throne of France! That must have set the other lords thinking and revising their policy of support to Edward. Also, how long will it take in Ghent for the most influential knights and poorters to realise James has returned from Tournai empty-handed? The grand army of England, Germany, Flanders, Brabant and Hainault has accomplished nothing of value! Edward has returned to England, tail curled between his skinny legs, chastened, broke, and humiliated.

James van Artevelde has returned to Ghent, shouting victory, claiming the king of France abandoned once and for all times the right to excommunicate us, a magnificent advance, of course, but had James not claimed to aim for much, much more when he took our militia on the march? Ghent has lost more than two hundred fine citizens dead at Tournai, and gained not much. James doesn't realise it yet, but his reputation of invincibility has been crushed against the walls of Tournai! Biervliet is long forgotten! James must realise he too has failed to progress beyond Tournai. Tournai was not even captured!

Still, James is shouting out his triumph in the Friday Market and to everyone he encounters in the streets. He walks with a stiff neck and high head in Ghent, followed by his substantial personal guard as if he were a consul in ancient Rome. He walks like a king! Does he really believe he has been victorious? How long will this last until his power becomes contested in Flanders and in Ghent? I'm afraid James has transgressed a point from which he cannot return quietly and in honour. He is committed to Edward, now, although he should have applied more discretion and waited to see how Edward fared in his claims to the throne of France and in his military endeavours. Jacob should in all logic abandon power today, and hand it back entirely to the aldermen of Ghent, but he has reached far too high. He can only continue and strike yet higher, defend his current position. James's recent murders testify to my argument, even though we too would not have allowed our honour to be besmirched. When a man is under tension, pushed to the wall, senses he might be crushed, he is prone to desperate, radical acts. A corned cat attacks and tries to kill! The murders he committed on the Brabantine knight and the torture of the Brabantine piper, are acts of a cornered man who sees his early successes fleeing in front of him. How many more murders must happen thus? I know, I know, we must all of us defend our honour with the sword, but our group has been constituted to think about reasonable means, not desperate acts!'

'I agree to that,' Arnout de Hert continued the reasoning. 'With King Edward returned to England, loaded with debts, James van Artevelde will be increasingly isolated. James may have convinced himself of a victory, but he has merely been adding to a self-illusion. Yes, I believe that is exactly what has happened! James seems to believe he cannot fail, so he has not failed! A man who must be laughing quietly in his fist and be abiding his next move, must be Count Louis of Nevers. His influence, and the influence of the *Leliaerts*, are bound to increase. The question is, what should we do as a group to guarantee our survival. How can we adapt to the evolving state of affairs? Do we follow James van Artevelde still or do we take an alternative route?'

‘We can talk to James van Artevelde and explain to him how we currently feel,’ Gillis Vresele proposed. ‘James has acted in our interest. We can tell him straight in his face he has not really come home with a victory in his pockets. That may get him to thinking straight again. It may come to him as quite a shock, or he may wave it away. I wondered lately who has brought James to the firmament of stars. Has it not been we who have launched James, or did James manipulate us to support him and project him to the forefront, to be the equal of kings? Has it not been we who have encouraged James to take the side of King Edward? We now realise Edward has not delivered, but James does not seem to want to realise Edward’s issues. James is an honest man, and a loyal friend. He backed the count until he saw, as we had to recognise, how treacherous that man and Philip of Valois could prove. James committed himself entirely to Edward, and loyal and honest as James truly is, he now remains fully loyal and committed to Edward, even though this loyalty may turn into disaster.’

Gillis paused. ‘Whatever, we must take care with our continued support of James. We can still advise him when he asks our counsel, of course, but I think you too have noticed he does that less and less. His advisors are the knight-*poorters* of Ghent, the van Vaernewijcs, and the Bettés, even some of the de Gruterés, less us! I say that is fine! Let it be thus! I say we draw back into the shadows! We vanish, profit from our trade and crafts and industry, and move slowly towards the established circles of old, to the parties that support the count and the *Leliaerts*, to the most moderate among these men of course, and to the circles that seek reconciliation with the count and the king, still and always keeping in mind we want wool and grain and free commerce, and a very strong Ghent, and do not need to totally break with King Edward.’

‘That is fine,’ Pieter Denout intervened, ‘but you may forget another line of thought. All you have said is about our position versus what happens outside Ghent. Please keep an open eye to what might happen inside Ghent! How do we survive that? Tensions are building up between our walls! The cloth traders have grown wealthier the last two years, the weavers also, though a little less. The fullers and most of the lesser crafts, however, have worked hard at the same prices as before the wool embargo. Prices of food and cloth have gone up. The same prices of the fullers have allowed the weavers to produce much and better cloth at low prices so that they could gain new markets and were able to compete in traditional markets, but the fullers are becoming aware only a part of the population is profiting from the better prospects, not they! I am no longer really a fuller. I am an investor, a broker, as you, even if I invest in fulling. I own three mills for fulling now, and I trade in fuller’s clay and in alum for the dyers, but I still have the ear of the fullers. The fullers resent that the weavers are back in command of the town, to the same power if not more than the fullers. The fullers, after all, form the guild with the highest number of craftsmen, not the weavers! Ultimately, the tensions will lead to a breaking of the peace among the guilds. I don’t think the weavers will want to consider augmenting the salaries of the fullers, so at one moment or other, the fullers may revolt. No such revolt can be peaceful in Ghent! Violence is to be feared. James van Artevelde is more occupied with the affairs of the count and the kings than with what is brewing inside Ghent. He may soon have more trouble on his hands with the guilds.’

‘I might consent to pay higher prices for fulling,’ Raes van Lake the Younger agreed, ‘but I can’t do that for now, for the other weavers won’t let me. If the threat of the fullers rises, I shall plead to pay higher salaries to the fullers. The dean of the fullers can propose raising prices to the aldermen. The weavers don’t fix the prices for fulling; the aldermen do that!’

‘Passions will flare,’ Pieter Denout replied. ‘Some weavers will have miscalculated as always; some weavers have not yet emerged from the difficulties caused by the wool embargo; other

weavers will refuse to pay more by principle and out of pure egoism. These weavers will only change their minds after an outburst of violence. The fullers know so much too!’

Raes van Lake the Elder sighed. ‘How about the grain trade, the wine trade, other trade with France?’

‘Booming!’ Arnout de Hert grinned. ‘I transport more grain in contraband than I did before legally. My ships have double decks and I have to pay customs officers to close an eye, which augments prices, but otherwise we survive, and survive well. Where would the farmers of Picardy go with their grain if not to Flanders? The farmers are quite willing to sell to the traders, and the traders to us. Picardy is with us, not with Paris.’

‘So, what do we do, finally?’ Gillis Vresele asked, out for concrete plans of action as any fine Ghent trader.

‘We do as more and more men of Ghent are doing,’ Raes van Lake the Elder sighed again, ‘we keep a healthy distance from now on from James van Artevelde. He has become a dangerous man. He is not anymore the van Artevelde of three years ago. His successes and the constant attention to his person have transformed him. He navigates less and less between the powers, as he has learnt he cannot trust the count and the king to honour their promises. He has taken sides with the king of England, and that, as we discussed, is a dangerous move. We meet more among ourselves. We do not stand anymore so close next to him at public meetings. We recede into the shadows. We answer James with good advice when he asks us, but we do not seek him out anymore and try to force advice and influence on him. I’m afraid he has moved out of our reach, to where we cannot follow him. He has moved to higher regions, to where for us, for the Pharaïldis group, he has to act without us being directly involved. It is a pity, I regret, but that is how matters stand. Do you agree?’

The Pharaïldis men nodded, but with bowed heads. I, Jehan Terhagen, watched with astonishment the ruthlessness by which these men decided and acted. They formulated their decisions by applying cold logic, using implacable arguments, unmoved by sentiment, and then they kept to their decisions in their acts. They tended to banish emotions from discussing about how they would best work together in the future. Still, they felt they were more or less dumping a friend.

When their decisions about James van Artevelde had been finalised, they began discussing their business ventures, which seemed quite simple as compared to the callousness of their judgement of James.

We, the younger men of the group, heard the enormous sums of money involved in what the older generation was concocting and in arranging how they would all benefit. We thought we were tough compared to our elders, but at what we now heard, at the stakes involved, we grew very quiet during that *Betsgravenbrug* council! The Pharaïldis families truly had become a concerted economic powerhouse in Ghent, and yet these men remained discreet, humble, almost meek citizens of Ghent, and they had even just decided to recede deeper in the shadows. We also thought about the responsibilities we one day would have to bear.

‘Power can be exerted in silence, built up in the shadows,’ I mused. ‘Is this the secret of the true power of Ghent, this calm understanding between families of old working quietly together because that is in their interest, thinking not as one sole man but as a single organ composed of so many brains? Is this also going on in other cities of Flanders, elsewhere?’ I was of course proud to be part of the Pharaïldis group. I did not say as much in the council, then, but I spoke with these remarkable men separately. I felt they appreciated my views, grinned when I explained what I had discovered. I decided to learn more about their trades and crafts, for I found no other endeavour in the world worth more honour. Fighting in a

battle was small beer compared to what these men were doing! The Pharaïldis men appreciated honour, but they appreciated peace more, and I liked that too. I hated the violence my parents had died by. I was grateful for the Pharaïldis men to have shown me an entirely different way of life than the passion and violence I saw around me. They were men of humble origins, but of a quite extraordinary insight, which they had reached by sitting together. They had trained and developed their abilities in their council meetings. When I talked to them about that subject, they seemed surprised.

‘We only apply the simple principles Juris Vresele taught us,’ the older ones answered, and so I was sad not to have known that special man who had gained the insight and the wisdom to create a new vision in Ghent.

Chapter 4. The Time of the Truces. Spring 1341 – Winter 1342

The Truces of 1341

After the siege of Tournai, Count Louis de Nevers, in accordance with promises made at Esplechin between the kings, returned to Flanders, to his castle of Male. The Council of Flanders, installed under the inspiration of James van Artevelde, controlled the count's activities. Loyal supporters of James served in this council, men like the ubiquitous Maes van Vaernewijc, William de Meerseman and Simon Ser Thomaes. The relations between the count and the *Ruwaard* Simon van Halen-Mirabello, appointed by the cities to rule the county in absence of the count, became more amicable. Simon founded the abbey of the *Groene Briel* in Ghent with the agreement of Count Louis.

The count treated the matter of the killing by James van Artevelde of the Brabantine knight at Tournai with much diplomacy during a meeting at Aalst. Amends were made to the duke of Brabant.

The Treaty and Truce of Esplechin had stated that the *Leliaerts* who had been banished from Flanders because they had joined the army of France, could not return to the county. The penalty for their coming back on the territory of Flanders was confiscation of their possessions. This clause allowed James van Artevelde and the cities to keep the most hot-headed of the *Leliaerts* at bay. Many of these lords did return, and afterwards refused to leave the territory. Their properties were therefore declared forfeited. The cities of Flanders gained large increases in their reserves from the sale of the confiscated properties, lands, houses, manors and other goods. Small revolts broke out, but were suppressed by the militia of James van Artevelde and by the local aldermen.

James van Artevelde's power was at its acme in those times. He had to oversee the appointment of aldermen in the lesser cities, which more than ever were submitted to the rule of the three largest cities Ghent, Bruges and Ieper. James had to ensure his policy of dominance of these large cities was respected.

The three largest towns of Flanders, Ghent, Bruges and Ieper applied under his direction appellate jurisdiction over the smaller towns. Bruges thus exerted such jurisdiction over towns such as Damme, Sluis and Aardenburg. Ghent had applied the right already from the beginning of the century over Geraardsbergen and the towns of the *Vier Ambachten*, notably over Axel and Assenede among other. Ghent also claimed such jurisdiction over towns such as Oudenaarde. The rules were not explicitly written down in charters, but they were nevertheless forced upon the lesser cities.

Among the representatives of the cities, usually the aldermen and captains, James van Artevelde also now associated the guilds. He gave the deans of the guilds, and through them the guilds as a whole, added authority. The deans of the guilds regularly accompanied the aldermen on their missions of pacification.

Authority is power, and power seeks more power. James van Artevelde might have underestimated the eagerness for power in some of the most ambitious men of the guilds. Guildsmen were seen from van Artevelde's time on to speak out more loudly in councils and with more confidence and more insolence. James van Artevelde had merely introduced this new element in his policy to form a counterweight for the dominance of the landowner knights and of the *Leliaerts* among the aldermen. The weavers and the fullers relished in their

new power, and some influential personalities in the guilds began to dream of taking absolute power over the city. The Pharaïldis men always sought compromise; not these men!

James van Artevelde was still in search of an established authority other than the count that could be accepted in Flanders, though the count had been called back to the county for exactly this same purpose. Throughout 1341, James van Artevelde worked at ascertaining the dominance of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, to suppress local opposition against the alliance with King Edward III, to keep the peace between the guilds competing for power in various cities, and to quench the revolts of the banished lords whose lands had been confiscated. He could count on the help of the aldermen of the three cities, among them prominently the aldermen and captains of Ghent. The van Vaerneuijck brothers were often sent from Ghent to other towns in Flanders to settle disputes or to enforce the peace. Acute situations of quarrelling and violence developed at Aardenburg, Kortrijk, Ieper, Oudenaarde, Geraardsbergen and Dendermonde, smaller conflicts in a number of the lesser towns.

At the beginning of the year, Catherine de Coster announced her husband she was pregnant again. She had shared James's bed several times in the preceding months.

King Edward III was losing influence with his allies in that year of 1341. In January of the year, at Vilshofen in Bavaria, the German Emperor Lewis, urged by the pope, promised to be henceforth a faithful friend and ally of King Philip of France. The emperor also abandoned all claims on imperial territories that had fallen in Philip's hands. King Philip thus could hold forever the lands and villages and small towns he had conquered from Count William of Hainault near Cambrai, in the Cambrésis region. Count William grew bitter against the lack of influence of King Edward. What good to him was such a passive ally?

On the eighth of February of 1341, King Edward of England addressed a letter to the towns of France. This letter was inspired by James van Artevelde. The king assured the city magistrates he would apply his reign to ensure the well-being of the people of his realm.

In the spring, King Edward had to consider the renewal of the war, as the Truce of Esplechin expired in June of the year. He convoked the English parliament in a session on the third of March and chose to negotiate with King Philip for the continuation of the truce. Edward's financial issues were still far from solved, so he was not ready to go to war that year. The Flemish cities and the lords of Brabant also feared the renewal of the war. They began reinforcing their frontiers. King Edward sent an embassy to Flanders to reassure the Flemish towns of his support in case the French king would attack. He declared he would respect the truce with France until later than Saint John's Day of the twenty-fourth of June and he announced a conference to be held at Antwerp as from the first of August of 1341. Talks between the aldermen of the three large cities of Flanders, the duke of Brabant and the other lords of the Low Countries, continued very intensively during that period and in view of the end of the truce.

In mid-June, the delegates of Edward and of Philip agreed to extend the truce until the twenty-ninth of August of 1341. This short lengthening of the Truce of Esplechin gave Edward and Philip somewhat less than three months respite to conduct negotiations. Although many lords from the belligerent countries indeed met at Antwerp, lords such as the archbishop of Reims, the count of Eu, the duke of Brabant and others, the demands of King Edward could not be reconciled with the demands of King Philip of Valois. The negotiations

took longer than expected. The truce was once more extended for fifteen days to the fourteenth of September.

Finally, as the negotiations drew on, the kings agreed to a further extension of the Truce of Esplechin to Saint John the Baptist's day of the twenty-fourth of June of 1342.

While these developments happened, in the spring of 1341, the last duke of Brittany died. His heirs were the duke's half-brother, Count John of Montfort, and his niece, Jeanne de Penthievre. Jeanne was married to Charles de Blois, a nephew of King Philip VI, son of Philip's sister. Montfort and Blois both claimed the duchy. As Blois sought support from the king of France, Montfort sought support in England. The war of the succession in Brittany started.

John de Montfort arrived in England in 1341 to acknowledge Edward III as the rightful king of France. Edward called John duke of Brittany and granted him later the title of earl of Richmond, the title of his confident Robert of Artois, who had then been killed.

Edward immediately imagined new opportunities in the war against France, using Brittany as a base of assault instead of Flanders. Brittany was of crucial importance to England. The Bay of Biscay was extremely dangerous for English ships to sail through on their way to Guyenne, so the ships followed the Breton coasts. With Brittany as an ally, the ships would be able to flee into friendly Breton ports during storms. An additional major advantage was that English ships would not be harassed anymore by Breton privateers and that the waters of Brittany would be cleared of French war ships. Edward enthusiastically supported John de Montfort.

The period following the siege of Tournai proved rather detrimental to the diplomatic efforts of King Edward to have the lords of the Low Countries vow to him. His long and strenuous efforts to bind allies to him came to nothing.

At the constant pressure of the French king, the German emperor withdrew from Edward the function of Vicar General of the Empire. Edward thus lost the supreme command of the imperial troops of the Low Countries.

He still held on to his alliance with Flanders and with James van Artevelde, the virtual master of the county, as the only remaining loyal, considerable ally north of France.

In June of 1341, Count Louis of Nevers, tired of the incessant and strenuous control of the Council of Flanders on his actions, left Flanders once more. His position of higher authority had been useful in Flanders, in a county of towns that remained very jealous of their privileges and freedoms as compared to other towns and the countryside lords. The authority gone, uprisings broke out at several places, which James van Artevelde had to deal with. He still rarely left Ghent, so the aldermen and other captains solved the issues while he followed all conflicts and directed the men to the various hearths of dissent.

Before the Truce of Esplechin expired, on the twenty-fourth of June of 1341, Pope Benedict XII ruled that the rebellious Flemings should remain faithful subjects of their count and king. He therefore refused to revoke the right of the French king to pronounce the interdict over Flanders. The papal decision embarrassed King Philip, for he had promised the Flemish to the contrary, and he did not wish to have the Flemish cities ever more leaning towards King Edward of England. Philip appealed to the pope, but Benedict continued to refuse. The Flemish found this one more reason to distrust the French king.

In July of that year, Catherine de Coster's second child was born. She gave birth to a daughter who was called Catherine by her father, James van Artevelde, after her mother. Catherine had deep-blue eyes, which remained blue after her first weeks, and blond hair.

In a charter signed the eighteenth of August of 1341, King Edward published the rules by which the wool staple of Bruges was to be governed. These rules were simpler and less strict than the earlier ones. A mayor and constables elected by the English merchants would oversee the staple. The staple of Bruges was served out of several designated staple cities of England; Newcastle, York, Lincoln, Norwich, Westminster, Canterbury, Chichester, Winchester, Exeter, Bristol, Caermarthen, Dublin, Waterford, Cork and Drogheda. The exclusive privilege of the wool transport from these English ports to Flanders was granted to the Flemish ships, at the detriment of the English vessels!

Not only did Emperor Lewis the Bavarian revoke the Vicariate General for King Edward of England, the emperor also allowed in the autumn of 1341 treaties of friendship to be signed between King Philip of France and archbishop Baldwin of Trier, as well as with archbishop Henry of Mainz. Edward could not but notice his allies in the Low Countries were all abandoning his cause.

Although the truce had been extended to June of 1342, the relations between King Edward and King Philip remained very strained in the second half of 1341. A new issue came with the succession to the Duchy of Brittany in France. King Edward supported John de Montfort, who had sworn fealty to him. He intervened in Brittany against the candidate of King Philip of France.

Edward ordered the assembly of a fleet at Orwell for an expedition against Philip in Brittany. Negotiations between England, France, Flanders and the other counties of the Low Countries were cranked up. Aldermen of Ghent travelled to London and ambassadors of England arrived in Flanders. James van Artevelde understood Edward had found another route, from which he could equally launch his campaigns to harass King Philip: out of Brittany. The negotiations of Edward with the lords of the Low Countries remained fruitless. In mid-April, the bishop of London, Earl Thomas de Beauchamp of Warwick and John of Offord arrived in the Low Countries to arrange the war against King Philip.

At the end of 1341, the war was not going well for John de Montfort in Brittany. The duke's castle was at Nantes, the capital of Brittany. In November, the French army besieged Nantes. Charles of Blois shouted his claims on the duchy from under the walls of the city. Although Blois was overly pious, his siege engines hurled the heads of thirty captured followers of Montfort into the town. This act terrified the defenders of the city so much, they surrendered. John de Montfort was taken prisoner and led to Paris.

The imprisonment of John of Montfort did not end the war in Brittany, however! His wife took up the banners of Montfort and continued to lead the war with vigour. She was Joanna of Flanders, sister of Louis of Nevers, count of Flanders!

Charles de Blois afterwards laid siege to Quimper, took the city, and killed ruthlessly more than two thousand inhabitants, as the town had resisted his will.

The Duchess of Montfort was more strong-willed and courageous than her brother Louis. She continued to resist the French armies that were thrown against her, fighting better than a man, riding in armour on a destrier, rallying the cities to her cause, showing her three-year old son as her husband's heir, fortifying castles of Brittany and placing strong garrisons in the walled towns of her duchy. Charles de Blois would have to capture city after city in very costly sieges and battles. The war raged all through 1342.

Weddings and Births

On the twenty-third of October of 1341, on a Tuesday, took place in Ghent the solemn celebration of the wedding of Margaret van Artevelde, the twenty-one year old daughter of James van Artevelde, with the knight and Lord of Erpe, Ser Walter.

Ser Walter of Erpe, lord of a castellany in the suburbs of Ghent, had been married before to a Catherine of Scoudee, but he was widowed from his first wife. He had three young children from this first marriage. Ser Walter was ten years older than Margaret, but still a fine, robust man in the strength of his year. Walter was also a gentle man, honest and just, a man of home and wife and children and dogs. Better, he was a lusty man who liked a joke and a laugh and a drink. He was not after worldly power, he had enough of that with his castellany, but he traded, more as a pastime than as an obsession for money, and he traded well.

He had met Margaret at a feast given by the aldermen of Ghent in the *Bijloke* field, almost a year ago. After having remarked her the first time, he had not been able to lose her from view. She was James van Artevelde's eldest second daughter, a very beautiful girl, a very distinguished woman with a fine, generous figure, hair the colour of ripening corn, and with a small uplifted nose that tore higher when Walter was introduced to her, but which then lowered so that she looked straight in his eyes when she heard his name. Margaret was obviously pleased with the name and with what she saw of Walter of Erpe, for they had spent the afternoon agreeably together, and Walter had lost his heart for the second time. Margaret liked older men, looked down upon silly young men of no substance, and teased Ser Walter with lustful swaying of hips and more.

Six months later, pleased with one another, Walter asked her to marry him. James van Artevelde too was pleased, for Walter was a nobleman, quite wealthy, his family famous, and James had remarked how familiar and happy his daughter was with Walter. The Erpe family had built up good connections, for the groom's brother, Rasse of Erpe, had married Jeanne of Mirabello, and the Mirabelloes were the richest family of Flanders! The marriage had been scheduled for the end of October 1341 to allow Catherine de Coster, James's wife, to recuperate from the birth of her second child, the daughter called Catherine like her mother.

The wedding celebration had taken place in the church of the parish of which James van Artevelde was captain, the church of Saint John. The feast was organised afterwards in the *Bijloke* field, where a number of large tents had been placed together for the many invited men and women. Tables and chairs had been placed in the tents in profusion. A large space had been left open in one of the tents for the younger who wanted to dance. Pipers, harpists, lute-players, drummers and other musicians played lively tunes when the guests arrived. Acrobats wrung themselves in the most impossible positions.

Very many people indeed had been invited to the wedding, for the marriage was one of the most prestigious of the last years in Ghent and in Flanders. Not only the members of the two families and their many friends presented rich presents. Also the cities with which James van Artevelde worked had sent delegates and wonderful gifts. Bruges offered the most expensive laced and embroidered tablecloths and two huge gilded vases. Ghent arrived with three silver vases, bought at the finest silversmith of Bruges by the city clerk Augustin, which cost almost six hundred seventy pounds. Ieper sent similar presents and even a smaller towns such as Hulst gave thirty-three pounds in gifts. James van Artevelde had graciously invited most of

the men from the cities he knew from having sat in conference with them. The wedding would be one of the largest and most splendid ever seen in Ghent.

The mass celebrated in Saint John's was served by no less than six priests. It lasted over an hour, psalms were sung, and then the bride and bridegroom were accompanied to the gates by the priests and their procession. They rode in a large chariot decorated with white flowers to the *Bijloke* field, driving so slowly that a long row of family and invited people could follow on foot. They were all dressed in the most splendid attire of dark clothes. A large crowd of people of Ghent had come to admire the spectacle.

In the *Bijloke* tents, bride and bridegroom sat in the middle of the main table of honour, at which also sat James van Artevelde and his wife.

Walter of Erpe's father, Goswin of Erpe, had passed away six years ago. Walter's mother was ailing, so the groom's parents could not celebrate with their son, but Walter had brought the rest of his family, and his many friends. At the table of honour also sat the aldermen who were close friends of James van Artevelde, prominent among them Maes van Vaernewijc, the captains and colleagues of James, and the older members of the Pharaïldis group, Gillis Vresele, Raes van Lake the Elder, Arnout de Hert, John Denout, Wouter de Smet and their wives.

The rest of the Pharaïldis families had been given another table, with other members of the van Artevelde family. I, Jehan Terhagen, sat equally at that table.

James van Artevelde looked particularly happy to see his family present, all together for the occasion, which was indeed a rare event, for the van Arteveldes were very independent individuals who seldom sought one another out.

The bridal pair had been lucky with the weather! The week had been warm and dry, as days could sometimes be in the middle of autumn. James van Artevelde looked around him many times, checking on whether the feast ran smoothly. With this event too he had a reputation to uphold. Flanders entire would have to talk about the splendour of the wedding! His stewards worked well, as always on such grand occasions supervised by Gillis Vresele. Earlier on, James had welcomed the delegates of the cities, men he knew, and now he stood from the main table, a glass of French wine in his hand. He walked to the tables of those men of Bruges and Ieper, giving them a joke, a warm salute, an address of honour as they deserved.

A man tapped James on the shoulder. James looked behind him and saw his brother Francis, red face of too much wine and too much laughter, but smiling. He liked Francis. Francis was his younger brother only by a year, a trader like he, James. Francis had proven his braveness as still a young man, in 1325, when he had defended the castle of Beveren, one of the fortresses of the border of the larger quarter of Ghent. Afterwards, the count had taken that position away from him, preferring a knight, but Francis had not fretted and continued his career. He had been a member of several envoys for the town of Ghent, until his trade interests drew him more and more to Bruges. His fortune had by then already been made. In the year James came to power, Francis had formally asked to become a *poorter* of Bruges, and bought himself the citizenship of the town. He had rapidly become a member of the exclusive *Hanse* of London, the association of overseas traders of Bruges. He was now a prominent man in Bruges, who had served the town in several delegations. Francis had been elected captain of the city somewhat more than a year ago! As captain he had even commanded a large military expedition of Bruges to Tournai last year, to be elected finally as alderman in the Council of Bruges! Francis had done well in his new home town.

He was a strong, very tall man with ample black hair and a dark beard, huge but jovial, always a grin and a smile on his lips, the friend of everybody. James van Artevelde had not to worry about his brother. Francis was intelligent and cunning, and he was courageous.

A third man came to embrace Francis and James. Their eldest brother William, too, was a formidable man. William had been the first son of their father, so called like the head of the family, as was the habit in Ghent. He was not as tall as James and Francis, a little stockier, hair and eyes brown, no beard, ample chest and muscular arms. William represented energy itself in its purest, rawest form! He was a born seducer of women, too. William also had married his daughter this year, in August, with a great Flemish feast. Like Francis, he had been a fine man-at-arms. Two years ago, he had splendidly led victorious military expeditions into western Flanders, rough country, for which especially the town of Ieper had thanked and honoured him. The father of the brothers van Artevelde had been a distinguished man-at-arms, a fine warrior, and so had his sons.

One other son had been murdered over a dispute in Mons. That had been the youngest brother, but the three remaining sons of William the Elder had all three proved their value as excellent commanders of troops and brave warriors. The year had been good for William too, for he had been appointed *Watergraaf* of Flanders, cater-count, a prestigious function. The cater-count needed a sharp eye, constant care for his responsibilities, and much intelligence. James had helped secure the position for his brother, with the cities and the count. The cater-count was responsible for the good maintenance of the waterways of Flanders, of the bridges and the locks on the canals and rivers. He also had to make sure the dikes were maintained in good order for preventing inundations. William looked after the mills that dried the polders, he dried out new polders. The cater-count could open and stop navigation on any river at will, so William enjoyed the particular attention of the shippers of Ghent. James had to deal with his brother for his polders at Weert and Zelzate and for his peat bogs near Axel. William was a man of fame in the best circles of Ghent, a hosteller also and a trader. He had been alderman in the year when James had come to power, in 1338. William had a fine, large steen in the *Sint Michielsstraat*, near the church of Saint Michael on the west side of the Leie and near *Tussen Bruggen*, the port of Ghent. James was very proud with his two brothers and he too embraced them.

Catherine de Coster watched the three men with amazement. They were huge men of standing. They hugged each other in public, glad of their success in life. William had been banished from Ghent for a pilgrimage to Galicia of three years, but that fact of long ago only seemed to add to the respect and envy with which the men at the wedding looked at him. He was also a very striking man, the handsomest by far of the three.

They had a fourth brother, John, who was a more quiet man, but equally a wealthy trader of Ghent. John sat a little further. He had not noticed the brothers had come together.

Catherine de Coster did not know by name and face all of the van Arteveldes! They were too many, cousins and nephews and men and women of whom even James did not know any more from which branch they originated. Catherine only knew well James's brothers and their sons and daughters, not the people from other branches.

Catherine saw James move farther. He first went to a table where his friends sat, then he walked on to the table of his sons and daughters. James had four children from his first wife, Agneete Vresele. The eldest child was a daughter, married to Godfrey de Roede, a cloth trader from a bakers' family. The couple lived now in one of the houses of the van Arteveldes in the *Kalanderberg*, but they were discreet people in a happy marriage.

The youngest son of Agneete, the one she died with in childbirth, was James the Younger. He was still a boy of eleven, but he sat nevertheless between Godfrey and John, James's other son, a young man of about twenty-three years old. John was the eldest son of James.

Catherine was a little worried with John, for he had been seen a little too often in the company of Christine van Steenland, the Lady of Drongen, another castellany in the suburbs of Ghent, and a noble lady of renown!

Yes, the children of James had set their eyes on the nobility, certainly Margaret who married today the Ser van Erpe, and now the son John too!

William van Artevelde, James's ebullient brother had the same thoughts as Catherine de Coster on Margaret's wedding, for when James passed between the very noisy invitees, he stopped James, pushed a new, full glass of wine in James's hands, whispering in his ear, 'well, James, now you can finally be satisfied! You are not yet in the nobility yourself, which no doubt will happen, but your daughter did! The marriage sure is worthy of a nobleman, of a grand lord of Flanders! Is that what you always wanted, being called Ser?'

'William, William, lower your voice a little! Yes, I am glad my daughter has found a fine husband, a man of distinction. What father wouldn't? But I would not have stopped my daughter from marrying a craftsman, or a poorter, well, preferably a wealthy poorter, of course!'

William laughed. 'Wealthy is the word we seek first, isn't it, James?'

'Don't we both?' James grinned. 'I heard rumours about your son William the Youngest too!'

'Which rumours?' William asked, suddenly very serious, lips tight.

'I heard he courts Zwane of Mirabello! There is hardly a richer or finer young woman in Ghent!'

William the Younger exclaimed in mocking laughs, 'yes, the boy is aiming high, isn't he?'

The naughty one didn't tell me a word, imagine that, until I caught them at it! Then I heard all what happened from my cook, a hearty woman who tells me the gossip of Ghent and who is the confident of my son. I asked him immediately, of course, whether he knew with whom he was fooling around. He reddened a lot before he confessed he was secretly seeing that Zwane, in all good honour, mind you, and in good humour, but in secret. I told him he had better talk to Mirabello father, otherwise I would one day find his body floating in the Leie. They seem to be in love, can you believe me? Love! Tell me, what does that word actually mean?'

'And you tell me I am the one who wants to have my children married into nobility?'

The Mirabelloes were a family of Lombard origin, also called van Halen in Flanders. The name of van Halen-Mirabello was probably the utmost distinguished one of Flanders, with the name of the Kortrijkzanen! The bastard sister of Count Louis of Nevers had married a Mirabello, and the Mirabelloes were wealthy enough to loan money to King Edward himself!

Had Catherine de Coster heard what William and James van Artevelde were talking about, she would certainly have been amazed once more with how her husband was going to be connected to the nobility and to the wealthiest men of Ghent. James was the exponent of these powerful men, the king on the chessboard they had advanced a little when all the wealth had seemed at stake in Flanders. James had done well with what they had expected of him, and they allowed him and his family more and more in their midst. How high would James reach?

I, Jehan Terhagen, too, watched the van Arteveldes with much deference and admiration. The brothers were powerful men and wealthy, their power originating in their character, talents and intelligence. They were a formidable force in Ghent. They looked arrogant, but they had the right to hold their head high. They had accomplished far more than the ordinary trader!

James van Artevelde had turned Flanders into some sort of republic, it seemed to me, though nobody in Ghent used or dared use that word. For all I knew, republics never lasted long. The Athenian democracy in antique Greece had been defeated in the Peloponnesian war by the oligarchy of Sparta, which had two kings. Republican Rome had been transformed into an Empire by the Caesars, and as far as I knew the Italian city-states were leaning towards becoming disguised dictatorships. The republican form of government simply didn't seem to work on our continent. How long then would James van Artevelde and the large oligarchy he represented hold out against the logical, traditional, so-called rightful leadership of the count? The van Artevelde brothers were men who had shaped their own destiny, I mused, which was extraordinary, whereas I usually took for granted our fates had been written a long time ago in the book of God. Would I have accepted beginning what James van Artevelde had accomplished? I didn't think so, or I had abandoned such a function early on, like Cincinnatus! The intrigues of politics were not for me! I hid in a corner of the tents and drank my sweet wine, watching the feast. I did not dance. I wondered when I would meet a young lady who caught my eye. That evening, my eyes seemed much closed to female beauty! Finally, two marvellous blond heads drew me back to the tables in the hall, the twins Wivine and Quintine Denout, the ten year old daughters of Pieter, who seemed to be my best friends that evening and who wanted me to entertain them with laughter and dances.

The feast of the marriage of Margaret van Artevelde with Walter Lord of Erpe lasted until deep in the night. When all the invited people had left, except a few heavy drinkers who huddled together at the table of the wine and beers, I saw James van Artevelde still sit with his friends at one table. His dearest friends remained the Vreseles, the van Lakes, the Denouts, the de Herts and the de Smets. These he trusted, I remarked. Catherine de Coster had gone home alone, accompanied by a few guards of her husband.

The Truce of Malestroit, end of 1342

In the spring of 1342, new negotiations began between the count of Flanders and the cities to prepare Count Louis's return to Flanders. Aldermen of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper begged for the count's return. Everybody in Flanders felt by then the authority of James van Artevelde was only a temporary one, justified by no solid basis. For Ghent, the aldermen Maes van Vaernewijc, Simon Ser Thomaes and Pieter Zoetaert participated in the talks with the count. Count Louis returned once more to Male in the beginning of August of 1342. He had won the bet from his wife.

At the end of April of 1342, Pope Benedict XII died. He was succeeded in May by Peter Roger, formerly bishop of Arras and archbishop of Sens, then archbishop of Rouen. The new pope chose the name of Clement VI and he was, of course, a Frenchman, who remained at Avignon.

In May, one month before the Truce of Esplechin would end, Hainault and the cities of Flanders once more prepared for war. At the end of that month, a conference was held between the ambassadors of England and the Flemish cities. The discussions with the duke of Brabant and the count of Hainault were continued at the beginning of June in Brussels.

During the entire year of 1342, King Edward of England had excruciating difficulties collecting the heavy taxes that were to save him from his creditors. He had to cope with

uprisings because of these taxes in several cities. Merchants refused to provide the wool that added to the taxes, and smuggling became commonplace. His financial difficulties included the pressures from his allies to pay the sums promised. Edward had been forced to conclude the truce of Esplechin because of these financial issues, right at the moment Tournai had been ready to surrender because the inhabitants were starving. Now, Edward had to borrow money at ruinous terms. In Ghent, he was constantly besieged by his many creditors. King Edward therefore still sought to negotiate a new truce with France. These efforts turned to nothing, so the truce came indeed to an end in June of 1342.

In June of 1342 also, Edward was forced to postpone the marriage of his daughter Joan to Frederick, son of the duke of Austria, at the request of the groom's father, Duke Albert.

In the last days of May 1342, the delegates of England, Flanders and the other Low Countries, assembled at Mechelen. The earls and bishops of England allowed for the wishes of the Flemish cities to be satisfied, for the war effort would be directed against the county of Artois, which had in early times also been a part of Flanders. Artois had ceased to be part of the county of Flanders since the end of the twelfth century, more than one hundred years ago, but that did not matter for James van Artevelde. James van Artevelde still held alive the ambition to conquer all the lands that had erstwhile formed the county of Flanders.

King Edward prepared for the war, since the truce begun at Esplechin had ended in June. The earl of Northampton would be his commander in France.

From July to October of 1341, King Edward had collected wool for the duke of Brabant and continued payments of debts until December of the year. Edward owed still vast sums to Duke John of Brabant, which could only be liquidated in July of 1342 by an assignment of over three thousand sacks of wool. Brabant even held the earl of Northampton in hostage for these payments.

The merchants of Mechelen asked him forty-two thousand Florins, the ones of Leuven almost six hundred bales of wool. The margrave of Jülich had loaned Edward thirty thousand pounds and Edward owed William of Hainault more than twenty-five thousand Florins.

To the three towns of Flanders he owed thirty-five thousand marks.

As the war was to resume, the pope and the papal delegates met with representatives of the Flemish cities. Pope Clement VI had declared quite explicitly in October of 1342 that if the Flemish did not return to their alliance with Philip of Valois, he would excommunicate them. The pope wanted the count of Flanders to return to his county as immediate lord, not necessarily as sovereign lord. The Flemish representatives knew what to expect. The cardinals threatened with the interdict should the Flemish help King Edward against their feudal lord, King Philip. The Flemish knew the effect of an interdict on Flanders, as they had been submitted already several times to it. They were not impressed.

End of July, the count of Flanders arrived totally unexpectedly at the town of Menen, on the border of Flanders and France. He had returned to his county. The astonished Flemish authorities honoured him. In the beginning of August, the count was back at his castle of Male. Among the delegates who welcomed the Count of Flanders at Male, was the Bruges alderman Francis van Artevelde, James's brother!

James van Artevelde had not well understood at first why the count had returned, also because Louis of Nevers seemed remarkably composed, relaxed, taking no new initiatives and remaining on very courteous terms with the magistrates of the cities.

The count's loyalties and aims had not changed at all, however. He was still an ardent follower of King Philip. He had merely been waiting for the Flemish to find out by themselves King Edward stayed in far England and did not really intend to use Flanders as his second base, even though Edward sent as envoy William Trussel to reassure the Flemish cities of his dedication and relentless support.

On the second of August of 1342, the militia of the cities of Flanders marched to Cassel and from there to Gravelines, where they set up camp in front of the French army led by the count of Eu and the count of Valois.

The English army never arrived.

The war thus started again, first on the borders between France and Hainault. The cardinals of the pope persuaded Duke John of Brabant and Count William of Hainault to remain neutral in the coming conflict, but in that treaty a clause was inserted allowing the lords to assist Flanders in case King Philip should attack that county. This clause allowed the earlier treaty between Flanders, Brabant and Hainault, to be retained. The Flemish refused a separate truce to the cardinals, in line with their support to the king of England. The Flemish strengthened their borders. They placed strong garrisons at Bergen and Cassel. Numerous messages were then exchanged end of 1342 between England and Flanders.

Flanders remained faithful to its policy of support for King Edward. But King Edward was very slow in paying his debts to the cities, which left the towns in a quandary. The three large cities ended the year 1341 with important deficits. It was necessary to talk to the king about the war and about their finances.

Pope Clement VI worked energetically towards another extension of the expired truce. His cardinals were successful! A treaty was finally accepted in January of 1343 to cease the war for a period of almost four years, until Michaelmas of 1346. Under this treaty, reached at Malestroit, the people banished from Flanders were still not to return, and the cardinals earnestly attempted to allow for the absolution of the Flemings from excommunication and interdict. Count Louis de Nevers would remain the legitimate count of Flanders, excluding other forms of government for the county. I, Jehan Terhagen, will tell you some more about that Truce of Malestroit, later, because Catherine de Coster played a not unimportant role in its negotiation.

The major scandal of the court of England of that year 1342 was heard as far as Ghent. Edward III was still involved in the war in Scotland. After an arduous battle in that country, King Edward, just thirty years old, visited Salisbury Castle. The countess of Salisbury was a very beautiful lady. She was Catherine Grandison, married to William Montacute, first earl of Salisbury and friend of Edward III. The king was immediately love-stricken with the fair countess. Although Edward was a handsome man, who displayed considerable charm, she repulsed the king's advances. Edward was angered. He needed an amorous adventure to be more content, gay, martial, vigorous in war and more amiable towards his friends. The longing for the beautiful countess had turned him into a grudging, morose man. Like King David did with Uriah, Edward sent the earl of Salisbury to Brittany as envoy to the duke, while he eagerly sought the company of the beautiful lady. When Edward was once more rejected, he managed to be alone with the countess in a room of her castle, and raped her. He forced her mouth with his hands so that she could not cry out for help, and then he left her lying in blood seeping from her private parts. King Edward returned surreptitiously to

London, his heart heavy with the knowledge and remorse about what he had done weighing on his mind.

When the earl of Salisbury returned to his castle, his lady would not lie with him, and she had to explain to her husband why. The earl was a friend of the king, but now he felt dishonoured. He rode to the king's court, divested himself of his lands allowing his wife a life-long dowry, and confronted the king. He cried out his shame at court, reproaching Edward for having dishonoured him. Then he left the country. Almost every knight at the court blamed the King. James van Artevelde did not believe the story! Some or other enemy of the king might have used the only weakness of Edward, his desire for women, to spite and destroy the king's reputation.

Another story went that when King Edward had conquered and captured the harbour of Calais, he ordered a court ball to be organised. While the beautiful countess of Salisbury, this one however being Joan, 'the fair maid of Kent', was dancing, her garter slipped from her leg. The courtiers sniggered and grimaced, but the gallant king stooped, picked up the garter, handed it to the astonished countess, exclaiming 'honi soit qui mal y pense', shame to the person who thinks evil of the garter and of me picking it up. Edward thereupon installed the Order of the Garter at the court, for himself, his son the prince of Wales, and twenty-four of his most loyal knights. Among the first knights of the Garter were Thomas de Beauchamp earl of Warwick, John de Beauchamp, John Chandos, Thomas and Otho Holland, Jean de Grailly called the Captal de Buch, Henry of Grosmont earl of Lancaster, and even William Montacute earl of Salisbury, with others. The words the king pronounced after picking up the garter became their motto, the order the most prestigious of England.

Meanwhile, James van Artevelde still had much work with pacifying Flanders from the various strives. One example was a revolt that happened in Oudenaarde, a town that stood under the influence of Ghent.

Shortly after count Louis returned to Flanders, in the month of August, a strange uprising indeed began in the town of Oudenaarde, inspired by the disgruntled exiles of the Treaty of Esplechin. The revolt seemed to be caused by the dissatisfaction of the knights of the town, but it was more caused by the antagonisms between the weavers and the fullers, and by the domination of Ghent. Two persons played important roles: the dean of the weavers, Gillis Craenhals, and the captain of the town, Lambert Mondekin. The lord of the castellany of Oudenaarde, William of Mortagne, had joined the French army and had therefore be banished from Flanders, his properties confiscated. To keep order in the town, Lambert Mondekin had been appointed by Ghent as captain. Mondekin was not very fit to occupy such a function. He was afraid, shy and uncertain in his decision-making.

Gillis Craenhals feared a plot was being organised against the weavers in Oudenaarde. Mondekin feared a plot by the knights. Both men were in fact out for more power in the city. Mondekin asked for more guards from the aldermen. Craenhals shouted he too would have more guards then, chosen from the members of his guild. Mondekin did not receive his added guards from the aldermen, so he asked for help from Ghent.

The captains William van Huse and Peter van den Hovene arrived a little later with militiamen and with a group of English archers. At the orders of these captains, the aldermen

of Oudenaarde allowed Mondekin his twenty additional guards. Covered by the power of Ghent, Mondekin and Craenhals then separately visited the houses of the knights of the town, in search of evidence of possible revolts. No conspirators could be uncovered, also not in subsequent raids of the guards of Ghent.

On a Saturday morning, during a meeting in the town hall, Mondekin was accused of having wanted the English archers and other warriors of Ghent to execute knights of the town. Angry words were also exchanged between Craenhals and Mondekin.

Craenhals put his hand on the hilt of his sword, ran to the windows and called out to the crowd that had assembled in the market place, 'look how they seek to kill me! Everybody to arms!'

Craenhals ordered his followers to call troops he had secretly gathered at Pamele. A few hours later, the men of Craenhals assembled in arms and ran with unfurled banners to the market place. A large number of fullers and landowner knights arrived also, shouting for 'Lord and Law!'

The weavers replied, crying louder, 'Town and Comrades!'

The fullers and the landowners south the authority of the Law, of the aldermen and of the count, their Lord. The weavers, supporting also Mondekin, saw evidence of the intrigues of the knights against the policy of James van Artevelde, against the dominance of the cities. The aldermen of Oudenaarde painstakingly succeeded in re-establishing order in Oudenaarde and Pamele, avoiding bloodshed. They installed a truce. The aldermen ordered everybody to lay down arms.

Craenhals had promised to remain in Oudenaarde, but he broke his word and rushed to Ghent. James van Artevelde thought Craenhals and Mondekin had been incompetent fools in Oudenaarde. He said so to Craenhals. James remained ever alert to the state of Flanders, however, and he did give some credence to the claims of a new plot of the *Leliaert* knights at Oudenaarde. His informants had warned him a large group of *Leliaerts* had assembled in the royal domain of Tournai, out for some mischief on the border and ready for any intervention against the Artevelde vision of Flanders led by the cities. An uprising in Oudenaarde might have the support of the fullers and the landowners, and these might ally with forces from outside the town to grab power over Oudenaarde. This would mean the *Leliaerts* could garrison the town with many troops and cut off Ghent from the north-west territories of France, from the Artois region, and close the Scheldt for Ghent commerce. Ghent obtained many provisions from over that territory.

James van Artevelde esteemed it necessary for any such plot to fail. He wanted a large force of troops, not just militiamen of Ghent but from the other large cities too, to be sent to Oudenaarde.

The aldermen of Ghent sent once more two of their colleagues and John van der Vloet, a member of the Council of Flanders, to consult with the count at Bruges over the Oudenaarde case. They also prepared a large force of militiamen to intervene in the rebellious town. In the meantime, the aldermen of Oudenaarde were seriously frightened on hearing a large military force might make its way to their town. They delegated Mondekin to Ghent and to the count, who had to assure that peace had been restored.

Mondekin's efforts came too late. On Sunday the fifteenth of August, the militiamen of Ghent arrived already at Oudenaarde. The captain of the militia of Bruges, Coudenhove, and William van Vaernewijc, Joseph Aper and Gelnoot van Lens commanded the troops of Ghent. Four of the Ghent aldermen and the three deans of the guilds of Ghent accompanied them.

The deans were Gillis van Gaevere for the weavers, Zeger Boele for the fullers and Pieter Zoetaert for the lesser guilds. James van Artevelde had sent a formidable force to Oudenaarde. These men immediately took power in the town, and ordered an inquest to be made. Other aldermen from Bruges and Ieper arrived somewhat later. The delegates of the three larger towns conducted the investigation into the allegations of Craenhals and Mondekin. On the twenty-first of October 1342, the aldermen of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper heavily fined Oudenaarde, but the peace was restored in the town. The troops of the large cities remained there until as late as December.

In the month of October, other discords broke out among the crafts of Bruges and Ieper, demanding intervention of Ghent. Gelnoot van Lens, accompanied by the deans of the weavers and the fullers of Ghent, re-established order.

The dominance of the three large cities thus proved overpowering in the period of 1341 and 1342, and James van Artevelde headed and guaranteed this power. Count Louis of Nevers was forced in that same month of October to order no more cloth could be offered for sale in the *Brugse Vrije*, the countryside castellanies around Bruges. He granted military rule over the *Brugse Vrije* to Bruges. In order to guarantee the peace, it became forbidden to cry out either 'For Bruges!' or 'For the *Vrije*!' A force of militiamen of Ghent helped the traders of Bruges to destroy all the weavers' instruments in the *Vrije* that could be used for weaving cloth, exactly as the weavers of Ghent had done earlier on in enforcing their privilege on the manufacture of quality cloth around Ghent.

James van Artevelde ruled Flanders well, using the aldermen of the three largest cities as the legal power. The *Lieve Canal* was ameliorated so that the transport of goods between Ghent and Sluis went quicker and easier. He ordered that the merchants who brought salt, wine and other products from foreign regions also had to bring in grain to Flanders. The French embargo on grain exports became much less efficient thereafter. James stabilised the value of the Flemish coinage and continued negotiations with England to unify the coinage.

The delegates of the cities of Flanders gathered on the ninth of November in Damme near Bruges. The count of Flanders participated at that meeting. He delivered a warm speech in favour of the French views, but his speech was received very badly. William Trussel, King Edward's envoy, had also been invited at the conference. The delegates of the three main cities afterwards met again in Ghent, where they reiterated their vows of loyalty to King Edward.

Behind the scenes, the count of Flanders had been quietly reorganising his followers. He had appointed leaders and grouped the *Leliaerts* of the county around these men. Each leader received a banner behind which the knights and their men-at-arms had to rally. James van Artevelde heard of an impending revolt organised by the count against his policy. In particular, he heard of a possible revolt in Aardenburg. He rode to the small town, accompanied by a strong force of guards of Ghent, rode straight to the house of the suspected leader, had the man ruthlessly killed, and found the banner that was the symbol of the treason. James van Artevelde then had other *Leliaerts* be arrested and interrogated. He rolled up one

by one all the centres of *Leliaerts*, and thus thwarted once more the treacherous designs of Count Louis.

The count was extremely angry to see his plans frustrated, especially the uprising at Oudenaarde. His schemes to introduce his exclusive, sovereign rule over Flanders had once more failed. He left Flanders on the second of January of 1343, two weeks before the Truce of Malestroit was signed between the kings of France and England. He returned again to his sweeter, more docile lands in France.

In Brittany, Joanna of Montfort held out against Charles of Blois. When Charles besieged her castle of Hennebont, she encouraged the inhabitants to hold out. At one point, Charles's camp was left almost unguarded, so Joanna sallied with three hundred men-at-arms and set the camp to fire. Henceforth she was called 'Jeanne la Flamme' or Joanna the Flame in Brittany. Fighting desperately on, she held out until Hennebont was relieved by English ships bringing troops led by Sir Walter Manny.

In September of 1342, King Edward decided to intervene in person in the war of the Breton succession. The Duchess of Brittany, Joanna, had heroically resisted to Charles de Blois and his French army. Edward III, always chivalrous, assembled his fleet at Orwell, and sailed to Brittany. On board of his ships he embarked about twelve thousand men, archers, knights and men-at-arms.

He set land in Brittany at the port of Brest and led his men on a savage campaign through Brittany, laying siege to the largest cities of the duchy, which had fallen in French hands: Rennes, Nantes and Vannes.

King Edward started at Vannes. He laid siege to the town. Robert of Artois was still with him, then, but Robert was killed in that siege. Edward bestowed Robert's title of earl of Richmond on John de Montfort.

Catherine's English Mission

On a cold evening of the autumn of 1342, James van Artevelde entered his house on the *Kalanderberg* after a particularly stressful day. James heard no noise in his hall. He threw his cloak on a chair. He sought rest for his mind after a tumultuous day. When the aldermen, the deans, the captains and the council of Ghent shouted all around James, he had learnt to listen imperturbably, to shut himself largely off from the tumult, to think, listening but not reacting for a long while until everybody had his say, and then he would present a few conclusions and decisions that would be executed. He had learnt to shield himself from virulent critics afterwards. The men who knew him well watched out for signs on his face, signs of approval or of disapproval. He usually let the storms blow over his head, until nobody had still any new argument to add, and then he would sum up and tell everybody what to do, suppressing counter-arguments with a few hard words. When the men had emptied their store of arguments, they were tired of the political infighting, ready to support what James van Artevelde felt should be done because it carried logic and truth. James then rejected the arguments he considered stupid and could not be led further. As with time the men tried to avoid embarrassment, they became also more careful in throwing any argument on the table.

James usually knew from the beginning how such meetings would end, his decisions and opinions already made, and rarely changed by what he heard at the meetings.

Catherine de Coster had heard her husband enter his hall from out of the kitchen. She opened the door to the hall, asked him whether he wanted to eat something, to which he said no, thanking her, for he had eaten with a few aldermen of his confidants in the *Schepenhuis*, while in meeting with them.

Catherine then asked him how his day had passed, and what was up new in Ghent. She liked to be kept abreast of events in the town and in Flanders, asked for first-hand information. Catherine also still worked in the supervision of the accounts of Ghent, so James indulged her and explained in a few phrases.

‘Nothing much new has happened,’ James sighed calmly. ‘Very much the same as the usual bore. We must still send a few aldermen and a captain to keep the peace in the smaller cities we control. Bruges and Ieper are doing the same. There has been some uproar about the debts of King Edward. The aldermen don’t quite understand why Edward fled, though the reasons are evident. The man fled from his damn creditors! Nevertheless, the aldermen want to delegate someone from Ghent to England to talk with the king, insist he pays his debts, and urge him to give us more money. Edward owes large sums to the aldermen. These cry out loudest, of course. They wanted to send a knight to England, though I found the whole idea quite useless. Of course we have to insist some, so that the king pays us before he pays others, but I do not want us to push the king too far. Either the king has no money, or he has. When he has, he will pay, for that is how I know him. Insist won’t help much. I also distrust the knights of Ghent, the names the aldermen may come up with. What if they propose a Borluut or a de Grutere? Only the Lord knows what such a knight might tell for nonsense to Edward and try to put pressure on the king. I objected to have a knight sent. No name was mentioned. We have not yet decided on who to travel to England. I thought of your brother, John de Coster. He is a sensible man, sufficiently connected to us to carry some weight and credibility with King Edward. John is dedicated to us, loyal, and far from a fool. He is a knight I can trust. He will not betray us and he will present sensible arguments to the king.’

‘How about the van Vaernewijcs?’ Catherine proposed.

‘No! I need the van Vaernewijcs in Flanders. William is my best captain with Gelnoot van Lens, and Maes is a respected face quite well known in many cities. He is an authority I need. I have missions for them that may last several months. Gelnoot is also occupied. The other captains are no diplomats. I cannot send a craftsman, not even a dean, to the English court! No, your brother John is a knight and about the only man of noble descent I can trust totally for the moment. He speaks with elegant, soothing words, and he knows how to be courteous with the king. He is a fine negotiator, too.’

Catherine de Coster looked at the ceiling for a few moments. She was lost in thoughts. She fought a temptation, then yielded. A soft look came over her face. She remained silent. James looked at her. She brought her gaze back to her husband.

Catherine whispered, ‘you could send me back to England!’

James van Artevelde was startled. He probed Catherine’s eyes, her face. He saw the lips contract and quiver. Catherine bit on her lips as if she had said something she regretted already. Her eyes avoided James, then settled back on his face.

‘You’re not serious,’ James exclaimed.

He dared, ‘are you so anxious to see him again?’

Catherine didn't answer. She kept silent. She looked at her fingers, head bowed. James went to a cupboard, took an earthen cup and poured him some wine. He showed another cup with his hand, glanced interrogatingly at Catherine, but she shook her head. She wanted no wine. 'I have already been to England,' Catherine added as persuasion. 'You sent me to Queen Philippa in early spring to explain to her what was on in Flanders and what you secretly wanted of the king. I know how to sail from Sluis to London. I do not get sick on the sea. I'll choose a ship bound for Gravesend. I've been to the palace at Westminster and if the king is not in London, I'll travel under escort to whatever castle he is in at the moment!'

James did not react, drank.

Catherine continued, 'I'm a noble woman, and the wife of James van Artevelde. I know the king. I have spoken to him and I have dined with him. I have spoken in confidence to Queen Philippa. King Edward will listen to me, more than to any man of Flanders. He'll hear me out. He can ignore many men, send them back without listening to them, even my brother. He cannot ignore me!'

'That he can't, indeed,' James replied without looking up from his cup, which he kept turning in his hand.

James was thinking, 'what can and should I do with such a proposal? She is desperate at seeing Edward, so much is sure. I have always been gentle and lenient with Catherine, even when I shouldn't, not really. What will the aldermen say to this proposal? They will do as I say, but more than half of them will eagerly accept the proposal, however weird it seems sending a woman to England and to the king, pretending they know all too well why Catherine would sail to England. The other half, unaware, will accept only to have her separated from me and to spite any other colleague for not having been sent on such a prestigious mission. Why do I like Catherine enough to let her have what she desires? Am I a weakling, after all?'

'It is a dangerous journey,' James feebly protested. 'We're in autumn, winter is near. Storms linger in the North Sea much more than in spring. You would suffer on board of a ship.'

'That would only last one day,' Catherine replied, suddenly excited. 'The sea voyage won't last long. Arnout and John de Hert can find me a fine cog, a truly sea-worthy one.'

'Are you serious about this? Much is at stake with this mission.'

'I am! Who else in Ghent would speak better to the king?'

Catherine bit on her lips again.

James grinned, took to his wine, and needed a second cup.

'Why not?' he conceded suddenly, feeling the fatigue in his limbs and mind.

'I would still want John de Coster to accompany you, and there shall be a few delegates from Bruges and Ieper!'

'Yes,' was all Catherine whispered. 'I shall need only five guards, horses, no carriage for me, but a wagon for loading our things.'

'Would you ride in the open? What about winds and rain?'

'I do not intend to ride for very long distances each day,' Catherine replied, hands on the table. 'I suppose we can find inns and ask for shelter in abbeys and castles on the way. Find me a guard who has been to England before, who speaks English maybe. Provide me with a map. You must have maps in Ghent. The way to London is easy, but one never knows where the king might be.'

'I could have a map copied,' James agreed.

'That can be done in less than a week in one of the abbeys,' Catherine continued.

James van Artevelde thought on, 'what a woman! She is worth several men. She is young and intrepid, afraid of nothing. She would gladly go to the end of the world to see Edward again.'

We have only one life and life is short. I cannot refuse her, however much I might be mocked in Ghent. Moreover, she is right. If anybody can bend Edward, gain access to him, have him listen to her and get the right information, it must be Catherine.'

James concluded, 'all right, then! If there is not too much opposition among the aldermen, you can travel to England. The aldermen will decide tomorrow. Within the week you should be on your way. I'll have a map copied and I'll find you a guide, though you will probably be a finer guide than the man I come up with. John goes with you. Without John I can't let you go!'

'I'll talk to John. He'll accept me!'

'He does not just have to accept you,' James turned to Catherine. 'You'll be the head of the mission. He'll only be your guard and counsellor. Make him accept that!'

'I'll soothe him,' Catherine promised, smiling.

James nodded.

He said nothing more that evening. He emptied several more cups. He remained a long time alone in his hall, pondering still over the issues of the day. How much he lacked a tender, loving, warm embrace! He sighed and went to his room to sleep.

John de Coster accepted his sister as head of the mission. He understood the argument it was necessary to reach Edward, and his sister could do that.

When James van Artevelde presented the proposal the next day in the *Schepenhuis*, some of the aldermen grinned knowingly, all accepted with apparent enthusiasm. The brothers van Vaernewijc frowned their eyebrows, but said yes.

A week later, brother and sister de Coster rode out of the *Kalanderberg*, accompanied by five guards, five *knapen* of James's entourage. One wagon with chests of clothes for Catherine and John, a few spare clothes for the guards, provisions, and a small chest filled with gold Florins, followed them. One of the guards, John van Damme, spoke some English and had been three times already in England. Catherine had a map of the Thames region in her chest. She did not believe the map was a very good one, but she only needed to remind herself of the names of the villages between Gravesend, to where her boat would sail, and London.

Arnout and John de Hert had no sea-going ship in port. They proposed John de Coster to inquire in Sluis for Master William Daanen. This captain was a very experienced sailor between Sluis and the Thames. Arnout gave John de Coster a letter for Master William.

It was a good few days in autumn when Catherine de Coster rode out of Ghent. The weather was dry and warm in one of those periods when summer refused to die and lingered on, surprising men and animals with very agreeable sunshine. Her husband waved after her, but Catherine did not turn in the saddle. She rode straight to Sluis, not bothering with who followed her, her six companions. She arrived at Sluis in the late afternoon after a tiresome day, found an inn that seemed clean, and she wanted to set out immediately for the harbour in search of Master William. John de Coster kept her in the inn, promising he would go out and ask about in the port.

That same evening, a small group of men of Bruges and Ieper also arrived at the inn to greet Catherine. She wondered how they had found her, but Sluis was not a large town. The men had been sent by the other large cities.

Catherine was introduced to Captain John Lenvall from Ieper, tall, blond with blue eyes, dashing, lean, muscular, handsome and young, gallant and probably also very courageous. He held his hand on the hilt of a sword in an old, well-used leather scabbard. She also met James

van Scotelaere, Provost of Our Lady's at Bruges, older, dark-haired and dark-eyed, brown skin, a little pompous, short and fat, a man who liked a good joke. He came with Thomas Witlostael and Peter Ternincmaker from Bruges, younger men with dark complexions, both bearded, not too intelligent but amiable men, unarmed. The delegates arrived at Sluis without a specific escort. They were quite satisfied with the fine young guards from Ghent, the *knapen* wearing the badges of Ghent on their tunic. Lenvall and Ternincmaker immediately announced they would not accompany Lady de Coster if she pushed on immediately. They had a mission to fulfil in Damme first. They would sail later, and join Catherine in London. Catherine didn't mind, as long as she could advance. She spoke courteously with the delegates, refused to wait for them an additional week, and thanked them.

The next morning, John de Coster sought Master William in the inns and boarding-houses of Sluis. He did not find him, for the captain was still at sea, but due to Sluis within the week. Catherine was disappointed. She would have wanted eagerly to sail as soon as possible. She needed a captain she could trust, though, so she stuck with the prospect of crossing the Channel in Master William's cog and in no other.

Catherine, John and their companions waited three more days. The master's ship, the *Zephyr*, arrived in port the next day. The ship arrived very early, at dawn. John de Coster became aware only in the afternoon the ship had entered harbour sooner than expected. William was already taking on a new cargo he had to bring to Rye, but he accepted to take the group of Ghent to Gravesend. He would sail soon to Rye, unload his cargo there and then sail on to Gravesend. Catherine and John did not tell the sailor why they were travelling to England. They did not want spies of France to know when exactly a Flemish embassy was on its way to the king of England.

Master William was a man in his prime, short and stocky, born with the wind and dropped in sea-water by his mother, cunning like a fox of Flanders. He guessed immediately to where the escorted group of Flemish from Ghent were headed. He didn't move an eyebrow when the name of Catherine van Artevelde fell somewhat later. He held his mouth, tried no comment. He was not an ugly man, Catherine esteemed, with his rough red beard, scraggly red hair, regular features, looking a little like the son of a Viking of old. His eyes shone honestly, and he was quick with a ready smile. He proved efficient, down to earth, or, rather down to water, in his judgement and decisions. Catherine liked him instantly. When she mentioned she was a friend of John de Hert of Ghent, the man's eyes suddenly flared very brightly and a large smile appeared on his face.

'Ah, John, John, my best friend,' he shouted in his coarse voice with the accent of the coast, 'where is the time we sailed together on the many seas? I was a ship's mate with John, you know! Like two hands on one belly we were. If John had not been with me on our first ship, I would've been a dead man today. He saved my life in a storm I haven't seen the like of in years. I watched his back too, of course. Marvellous friend. How is John? Married and well, I hope.'

Catherine told everything she knew about John to master William.

William warned, 'with the right winds we can reach Gravesend in one day. With the wrong winds, we might be stuck and never get there, well at least, not in less than four days or so. We might be thrown too far south of the Thames. I'll then may have to follow the coast in contrary winds, which is sheer impossible and quite tricky. We may have privateers to flee from. The sea can be wild in autumn. You'll be sick! The best for you then would be to endure your sickness on deck, lying flat, and praying to God. I can promise you that you won't die, however hard you might pray for eternal rest. You'll get to Gravesend, all right! Are you sure you still want to sail?'

Catherine began praying immediately.

The men and the horses and even the wagon were placed on deck. Master Williams didn't like horses on his ship. He hated their dirt, but when Catherine added Florins in his calloused hand, the objections were swept away.

The *Zephyr* left Sluis on the second day, in the morning. Master Williams sailed early, for the winds were favourable and the sea calm. A small rain drizzled down and the sky was closed by thick clouds, but the waves remained flat as in a bath. The ship sailed proudly out of the harbour of Sluis and when the rolling and tossing of the boat started, Catherine felt as fresh as a bird. She relaxed and stopped praying.

She was more immune to the rolling and tossing of the broad-bellied cog than most of not all men who accompanied her. The crew laughed with them, not with her. John de Coster got sick after less than an hour of sailing. He hung over the wooden railing, vomiting all he had eaten the last day, and could not utter a word, believing his last hour had tolled. The delegates from the other cities were not much better off, and also not her escort.

Master William diligently avoided all ships they met. He sailed far from them. They did not reach Rye, one of the harbours of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports, in one day, but they did arrive in the port by noon the next day.

The *Zephyr* was unloaded in record time from the bales of cloth under her deck, and then Master Williams set off for Gravesend. He reached that town and port by the next morning. Catherine de Coster thanked him. She and her group disembarked. John de Coster loved feeling hard ground under his feet.

'For London, just follow the river banks to the north-west,' Master William told, but Catherine, whose heart beat faster with expectation, knew that too. She would find the king either at his palace of Westminster, or somewhere else in England, come what may. John de Coster led the group along the river. The group rode west, following the banks.

The delegation of Flanders arrived at London in the afternoon. The Flemish guard who spoke English asked precise directions for Westminster, and Catherine checked with the map. In the outskirts of London, the rain started to downpour. They arrived at the front gate of Westminster like wet ducks that had escaped from their pond.

Catherine told the guards who barred her way she was on a mission from Flanders to see the king. She spoke French, here. Twice she received answers in broken French saying the king was not at Westminster. Catherine shouted twice as hard, and so loudly that twice better dressed men were called in to calm her. Each sent for someone higher up in the hierarchy of fools. The fourth man that deigned to come to the gate, was an earl.

He called himself Richard, earl of Arundel, had fought at Sluis with King Edward and at Tournai, and explained to Catherine he knew James van Artevelde very well, was by chance and not for long residing in the palace, and was appalled to remark how soaking wet the Lady van Artevelde stood at the gate.

Catherine wanted to cry out, 'then let us in, you fool!' but she forced herself to patience.

Arundel made a brilliant appearance. He was extravagantly dressed in red velvet, outrageously long sleeves, long-tipped red leather shoes on his feet, his magnificent badge embroidered on a dark orange silk tunic. His legs stuck in tight orange and red striped stockings. A sword hung at his side, and that weapon had been well used, Catherine noticed. It was not a ceremonial, short sword but a long stabbing blade. Arundel told the Regent of England, the duke of Cornwall had himself excused because also not in the castle, so the lady Artevelde would have to do with him for the time being. He gallantly bade Catherine in.

While Catherine stepped gratefully under the covered porch, through the gate, Arundel was shouting orders like a flaming devil. He awakened the servants of the palace. Men came running from all doors in the courtyard. Catherine feared Arundel would have used his sword to urge the palace servants to action.

Two hours later, the men in Catherine's company had found lodgings. The horses and wagon had been placed in a dry corner of the stables and cared for, and Catherine's chests were brought to her beautiful room, in which Arundel in person had set fire to a hearth. Maidservants prepared her a bath, her clothes were placed in royal chests, some taken to the cellars to be washed and refreshed. Fruit was brought on large platters, to each room. Then, a messenger announced the earl of Arundel sought the honour to dine in the Lady Catherine van Artevelde's company. Catherine changed gowns, washed and dried her hair, servants combed and made it up elaborately, poured fragrances over her body, and prepared her for dinner. When she was almost ready, another manservant came to fetch her. She was led through endless corridors to another wing of the palace. Her companions emerged from another wing, and followed her.

Catherine entered a well-lit room. A huge fire crackled in the hearth. The windows offered fine views of the Thames. Arundel stood by the fire, warming his old bones he said, though he was still a young man. He welcomed Lady Catherine with honeyed phrases, and he also had a few nice words for the men. Catherine was still wondering why she had not received a message from the king. Would he reject seeing her? Arundel showed a table to his guests, invited the company to sit. Hot food was brought in by servants, more than even a battalion of coarse warriors would have been able to stuff in their bellies that evening. The men ate eagerly.

Arundel said, 'may I ask, Lady Catherine, what the purpose is of your visit to us?' 'I came to see and speak with the king, Lord Arundel,' Catherine began. 'I was sent on a mission by the city of Ghent. The aldermen and the captains of the city sent me, and of course also my husband, James van Artevelde. I came with representatives of the three main Flemish cities and a few more of those men will arrive in a day or two. We have several items to discuss with the king, items of our alliance, and of course, the magistrates of our towns have asked me to inquire to the health of his highness and to how his affairs progress.' Arundel looked surprised, paused, and then exclaimed, 'my dear lady, you really don't know then, don't you? I'm afraid having to announce you the king is not at Westminster! I'm afraid he is not even in England, Wales or Scotland! The king is waging a war in Brittany, on the continent!'

Catherine dropped her fork in surprise. The guards at the gates had not lied! Edward was not in his palace, and not even in England! Should she now return to Ghent? No, she could not accept defeat.

'I have to see the king,' Catherine persisted. 'If the king is in Brittany, I'll have to go to Brittany then!'

The men from Bruges and Ieper looked at her with astonishment. They had rather expected Catherine to return to Flanders.

In front of her, John de Coster paled. He would have to face another, longer sea voyage with Catherine! The delegates from Bruges and Ieper paled. How obstinate this woman could be!

'Well, I say,' Arundel commented, 'do you realise, my lady, you would have to suffer another tiring voyage over sea, over the North Sea into the Celtic Sea? You would be travelling into a country at war, my lady, straight into a dangerous, ferocious war!'

‘Of course, of course, I do realise all that,’ Catherine replied nervously, almost shrieking, ‘but I have to see the king! Don’t you understand? I have to see the king! How could I best reach his highness, Lord Arundel?’

Earl Richard of Arundel threw his napkin down. He picked up a morsel of cock that had been boiled in strong, red wine, let the gruel drop from it, wanted to push it in his mouth, but he dropped it back on his plate.

‘Are you so much determined, my lady?’ he asked.

‘I am! I have a mission to accomplish, Lord Arundel, an important mission!’

‘Within two days,’ Arundel tried, ‘I have to travel to Brittany myself. I have business in Guyenne, in the south, and I intend to ride over the land to Southampton. I don’t like sea-voyages when they last very long, you know! I intend to go on board a ship at Southampton, a ship bound for Brest in Brittany. Our roads must separate at Brest, my dear, for I have to go farther south from Brest, follow the coast in another ship to Bordeaux. I can escort you to Brest, though. From there, you may find the Lady Jeanne de Montfort at her castle of Hennebont. She will protect you on your travel inland.’

‘Jeanne de Montfort is a sister of the count of Flanders, of Louis of Nevers,’ Catherine whispered.

Arundel understood easily why Catherine van Artevelde was reluctant to ask help or even call upon a daughter of the counts of Flanders. He had been in the county, knew its issues.

‘Quite, indeed,’ he replied, ‘but the countess is a Montfort now. Her husband, she and her son, are allies of England. She is fighting for her duchy against Charles of Blois and against Philip of Valois. I shall provide you with a letter written in my own hand, of course, explaining our support, and asking her graciously to assist you on your journey. She will not refuse, believe me! We are conquering her duchy for her from the greedy hands of France! Are the Flemish cities not doing the same?’

Catherine showed incredulous eyes. Arundel explained to her what had happened in Brittany, and why King Edward waged war there.

‘The king must have captured Rennes by now, as far as I know,’ Arundel continued, ‘and various castles on the way to Nantes. He should lay siege to Vannes or Nantes at this moment. Those cities are far inland. I shall not be able to take you there, starting from Brest. Jeanne de Montfort is therefore indispensable for you, for you shall need a larger escort and guiding.’

Catherine waved away the excuses of Earl Richard. She was very grateful he could take her to Southampton and on a ship.

The *Gentenaars* had a very fine stay in the palace of Westminster, the king’s residence in London. Earl Richard of Arundel used one more day to set his affairs to order in London, and then, with twenty stocky, battle-hardened men-at-arms as additional escort, he rode out from London with the group of Flemish delegates.

He took the direction of Southampton resolutely. Arundel had played the perfect host in the royal palace of London, replacing the duke of Cornwall who replaced the king. Always optimistic, helpful, courteous, he proved the perfect guide for Catherine on the roads to Southampton. He never stalled a conversation, asked a thousand questions to Catherine.

One question often returned, ‘how did you enjoy the voyage from Sluis to Gravesend?’

Catherine unfailingly replied, ‘wonderful! It was my third sea-voyage, and I loved the quietness of the sea! I liked being swooned by the gentle waves, the regular movement of the ship, the soft, invigorating breeze, and the smells of the sea. How delightful the impression of being carried by the wind, light as a feather! Our ship was called the *Zephyr*, you know, my lord! I’ve heard of sea-sickness, but I seem to be immune to it. I don’t know what it is!’

Arundel looked disgusted at Catherine.

He grumbled from behind his grinding teeth 'I hate the bloody thought of being on water! It is not natural to man,' and he would ask no more, shudder, snort, and ride on.

Catherine smiled, for Earl Richard would not return to her for a while.

After three more days of riding, the group of Catherine de Coster and Richard Fitz Alan Earl of Arundel arrived at the large harbour that was Southampton. The earl's stewards sought an inn, then their ship, and they found the *Hastings Hermes* and her Master Julian Brighton, willing to take a group of men aboard. When he saw Catherine, he complained about the woman he thought was Arundel's mistress, and only a few horses could be taken. Catherine de Coster had to leave her wagon at Southampton, but her chests were taken on. Catherine didn't mind. She sold the wagon in the harbour and would buy a new one in Brest. It was decided to have only the horses of Catherine on the ship. Arundel would find other horses at Bordeaux.

The *Hermes* left almost immediately in very fine weather, bound for Brest. Master Julian didn't take much cargo with him, but he would return to Southampton laden with wine from the Gironde region.

Earl Richard could more or less be consoled with the fine weather, quite unexpectedly calm for this time of the year. The rain drizzled soon after the ship left the harbour. Everybody on board grew cold and humid, but even Arundel seemed to enjoy the fresh air and the soft movements of the cog under his feet. The wind was light, but blew from the north-east, from the right direction to guarantee a fine and swift passage to Brest.

After one day of fine navigation, Earl Richard got as sick as a man could get sick, sick as hell, and with him suffered most of the English and the Flemish escort. Catherine, however, tugged in a heavy fur-lined cloak, danced up and down the deck, climbed to the forecastle and craned her neck and her head into the wind.

Master Julian came to stand next to her. He too peered in the far.

'Had somebody told me, I wouldn't have believed it,' Julian began. 'My lady has true sea-legs! Are you sure you had no sailors among your forefathers? The rest of your companions are all sick, yet you dance on deck like a gull in the air. The sea is your element, it seems, my lady!'

Catherine smiled, thanking for the compliment.

'The sea is calm and peaceful,' Catherine replied, smiling, 'yet you seem worried, Master Julian.'

'A sailor who is not worried all the time is not a good sailor,' Julian retorted. 'Not yet here, my lady, but a little farther out are the most treacherous waters God has created on earth. In His great wisdom, He created them to teach humility to sailors, pilots and masters. No master and pilot who has ever sailed in those waters is still an arrogant man! We sail into waters of howling storms, currents and counter currents that can sweep up the waves to higher than a hundred feet! Six out of ten times, nothing happens, and you thank God you have reached Brest unscathed, but four times out of ten you pray to God to save at least your soul.'

'Where are we then?' Catherine wondered, interested, for she saw only water to the four sides of the *Hermes*. 'Is it so difficult then, to sail into Brest harbour?'

'We must be a little to the north of Le Tonquet in Brittany,' Julian informed Catherine. 'At night, we might have seen the lighthouse of the cape. We are a bit more in the open sea than I would have liked, because we have a slightly eastern wind now. I shall soon order us closer to the coast. As to getting into Brest harbour, nothing is easier than that! Brest is an excellent harbour, at the end of the Celtic Sea, quite far inland actually, very well protected against all

winds and waves. It can be rough weather in front of Brest, rough in wind and currents, but I can sail into the Celtic Sea eyes closed. Far worse is what lies in front of the land tongue of Saint-Mathieu, and we have to get past there. A series of islands lie in our way, the island of Molène to the west, the islands of the Christians and of Trielen south-east of Molène, two more islands called Ouéménès somewhat more east, the islands then of Litrin, Small Litrin and Morgol near, and southwards the largest one, Béringuet. The islands are easy enough to avoid, although currents and spirits draw unheeding sailors to there, but speckled among those islands rocks are lying in waiting, some huge, some small, some their tops above the water, much more lurking just below the level of the sea, all deadly. When the currents and the winds drive you to those places, you pray! You pray hard! If your luck fails you on one of those dragon teeth, you don't return, because you are pinned down, and you meet your Maker!

'I am confident you can bring us safe and sound through the islands, Master Julian,' Catherine smiled.

'God's will, my lady, God's will,' Master Julian grinned. 'I can get us past the islands, all right, in full light of a calm day and in storms not too violent. In other weather, God disposes! I'll wait for daybreak before sailing past Saint-Mathieu on the land of Brittany. We can then avoid the islands, sail along the coast, and enter the bay of Brest.'

Master Julian left Catherine, went on deck, but he returned a little later. He looked at the sky. 'Is all well?' Catherine asked him.

'I don't know,' Julian whispered. 'The wind has been blowing from the north-east now since almost a full week, and that has been good to us. We made good distance. Every sailor will tell you to fear the westerly and north-westerly winds, but look into the far, above the horizon. See those dark clouds? They are sombre, heavy, pregnant with rain and whirling gusts of wind. When those clouds catch up with us, close to the islands, they may throw us into the midst of the islands, and once we're in their midst, they will not loosen us out of their embrace. When the fiercest north-westerly winds arrive at that very moment, they turn the ship and turn and turn it between the two winds, and they may crush our cog. Then you should start praying, my lady!'

Catherine smiled. She supposed Master Julian intended to as yet frighten her. She looked on deck from the castle. She saw two men from her escort stagger from one side to the other, hang their bodies at the wooden railing and vomit their entrails out. A few men from Arundel's escort joined them.

'There are sea-English and land-English,' Catherine remarked, grinning, pointing at the sick men.

'And also sea-Flemish and land-Flemish,' Master Julian remarked, looking back from the men to the sea.

Catherine had only spoken French on the boat and told none of the sailors who she was, but the old salt had guessed rightly where she had come from. She didn't care.

'And the Flemish women apparently are sea-Flemish,' Julian added, laughing out loud. Catherine chuckled.

The *Hastings Hermes* threw out anchor in view of Le Tonquet to pass the night. Julian didn't venture on along the coast or between the islands in the darkness.

During the night, the winds blew harder, though still from the east. The movements of the ship became more dramatic. The *Hermes* was thrown in the air at the bow and then crashed low behind the waves. She was a sturdy boat, though, whose planks could move and shift but hold and remain water-tight. The men could not sleep. They grew sicker than before, feared every time the bow seemed to move into the air, relieved when the boat dipped.

Arundel crept over deck on feet and hands, sought the middle of the ship, hoping to find some relieve from the rolling and tossing and diving there, but he too got only sicker. Every movement of the floor under his feet was a torture. Totally exhausted, he bound ropes around his body and tied himself to the mast. He fell into a drowsy sleep from exhaustion.

In the morning, he was sicker than ever. He untied the rope and went on his knees to the railing of the ship, closer to the place from which he could relieve himself, empty his belly and his bowels. He felt miserable. A little further stood the horses, as miserable as he, whining and clawing with their hooves. On the other side hung the escort of English and Flemish guards.

At dawn, the wind was howling horribly around the *Hermes*, enveloping her in sharp gusts the power of which was felt in the bellies of all on board, and which made her beams and planks creak. The waves of the sea grew higher, battered the ship. They were not yet as high so as to frighten Catherine, though she was impressed. She too stayed on deck now, more than on the port castle, which stood at times almost straight above her. She had confidence in the old ship and in her sailors. She saw Master Julian climb the steps to the bow castle. She followed him, wondering how anybody could stand there. Julian seemed to be glad to have somebody to talk to.

‘We must weigh the anchor,’ he explained to Catherine. ‘We cannot hold any longer to the anchor in this weather. We must sail on. Are you still all right? Remarkable!’

Julian didn’t wait for an answer. He looked into the far. It was sunrise, but no sun could be seen, and Catherine even thought there was less light than an hour ago. She too looked far ahead, remarked how in the direction of the coast the sky darkened yet. Julian also looked over his shoulder to behind, and when Catherine followed his gaze with her eyes, she saw the sky even more darkening in the west than in the east. The sky was more filled with heavy, very black clouds, an enormous carpet of water hung above them.

‘What is that?’ Catherine asked, pointing to the skies.

‘Start praying,’ Julian replied.

The *Hastings Hermes* was caught between two storms that collided on her hull and beams and on her sail. The ship was suddenly whirled about, turned, turned again. Her sail tore open at the sides. The ship rose twice its depth in the air and was then thrown downwards with extraordinary power, the first of a series of terrifying tosses on the water that threw her sideways, stern high, and the ship fell down in the abyss of the sea again. Squalls of winds and water, angry waves, passed over her bow. The cog’s stern emerged over the waves. Catherine held onto the wood of the sides of the hull, arms around a hole in the sideboard, water flowing over her so that at times she could see nothing anymore but that gusting wetness. She could not remain standing. She knelt on one knee to the planks of the castle. Below her, very deep, she was two horses vanish over the railing, two more horses being crushed against the stern castle, planks and partitions splintering under the weight. The horses must have been wounded, fell on deck whinnying, clashed with their hooves around Arundel, and killed a guard. Nobody dared approach the animals, for they continued to slash out with their sharp hooves.

Not only did the clumsy cog rise steeply and obliquely in the towering waves, she rolled dangerously, taking in much water on starboard, but then her hull swayed to the other side and the *Hermes* fell heavily beneath a new wave. She straightened again in the boiling sea.

The pilot did not control the *Hermes* anymore. Not the rudder but the natural elements took command of her movements. They did with the ship what pleased them. The *Hermes* was inexorably being drawn to the east, Catherine remarked. The pilot had to direct his ship to that

direction, for otherwise the cog would have rolled under the waves. The *Hermes* did continue to ride the waves now, going up and down, waves rolling over her and crashing on her deck, planks and beams screaming in agony, but the courageous boat stayed on top of the squalls. The *Hermes* was sailing into the darkness, though the sail itself was being torn to shreds. The rain was pelting down. Catherine felt soaked as she had never been in her life, with salty and sweet water. When the bow castle rose, she could not see more than a few yards in front of the ship.

Master Julian still stood on his legs, upright, shouting orders to the pilot who held the rudder, and who could only barely hold on to it with both arms, let alone move it as he wished. The ordeal lasted. Catherine could not even see the other end of the *Hermes* anymore in the rain, fog and the rolling waves that burst in white foam over the deck.

The storm lasted for more than two hours before the wind and the rain seemed to have battered the poor *Hermes* sufficiently. The vessel was still the plaything of the elements, but the wind blew with less force and the waves were piled less high.

The pilot screamed to his captain, 'Ledenez!'

Julian called back, 'Petit Litrin!', and then a terrible crack was heard, a scraping sound that lasted a few moments. In a sharp shock everybody on deck was thrown to the wooden floor. The pilot held on to the rudder, but the ship did not answer anymore. Master Julian had to let go of the railing. He rolled to the other side, grabbed the flight of stairs that led to the deck, and found support for his feet.

'We have crashed into a rock, Jesus and Mary and the Saints,' Julian shouted, horrified, but there was nothing he could do for his crew or his cog.

The boat moved only up and down, slowly, much less than moments before. The storm subsided.

'Oh God, oh God,' Catherine heard Master Julian pray, 'I hope we get some respite to look at the damage below. Please God, keep us afloat!'

God gave some respite to the crew, but didn't allow the *Hermes* to float. The ship had been thrown into the air and been impaled on a set of sharp-tipped rocks beneath the water-line. Each time new waves crushed into her, she moved a few feet upwards, but was still linked to the rocks. She took in water below and lost water above. The *Hermes* was stuck, for the wind and the sea to break her at ease. How long would she last? The only luck the *Hermes* got was that the storm had passed over her, the rain stopped, and though the wind blew still strongly, the howling became a few tones lower. The worst of the storm seemed to have passed over them, the elements satisfied with their work of destruction. The sky lightened a little and Catherine could see, hundreds of yards away from her, the contours of a green island, rocky but grown with bushes, a large island, rising out of the water. Was this Ledenez or Petit Litrin?

'Petit Litrin,' Master Julian pointed. 'If the storm subsides, we might just make it to there. We shall sink, but maybe just at the beach. God help us!'

What Julian didn't tell was that the wind blew from the west, here. There was no way the *Hermes* could use that wind to run for the beach. How long could she float, her belly opened and broken, below, without sinking and drawing everybody in her to the bottom of the sea? The sky brightened more. Catherine took hope.

'Hello there, *Hermes*! What happened?'

Catherine felt a second crash, and she saw a large cog arrive out of nowhere and sail to alongside the *Hermes*. The ship scraped along the *Hermes*. A man stood on the towering bow castle of that ship.

‘Master Andrew Talbot here,’ the sailor shouted, cupping his mouth with his hands. Talbot placed his hands back on the railing and let his body move with the waves and the wind.

‘We are sitting on a rock,’ Master Julian cried with the wind. ‘Can you take us on board?’

‘You are welcome aboard,’ Talbot shouted back. ‘Come over! The sooner the better! I can’t let my ship be battered against yours for long!’

The wind diminished in power, but the waves still churned high.

‘Stay here,’ Julian shouted to Catherine and to the pilot.

Master Julian went down the stairs to his deck, still being forced from one side to the other. He began cursing to his crew, showing them how to climb on board of the second cog. The railing of that ship was a yard higher than the railing of the *Hermes*, but the men began to jump into the other ship.

Arundel came into action. He was still sick, but he gathered his wits. He ran to below deck, ran back on deck a few moments later, and brought two heavy chests to the railing. Catherine recognised his and her money chests. Arundel threw the chests on the deck of the other ship. He ran back to below deck, looked and grinned at Catherine, and came up with two more chests of Catherine’s things. He threw also these on board of the other ship. Two of his men saw what he was doing, and they began to help their earl until all the belongings of the Flemish delegation and of the earl were saved. The guards changed ships, and also the crew. Arundel, the pilot and Master Julian were the last ones to remain on board the *Hermes*. The *Hermes* had steadied, but Catherine de Coster knew that she had to climb from the castle down the stairs, or she would be lost. The pilot came to fetch her, and with that man’s help she slid to deck, where Arundel caught her.

‘I’m truly sorry, my lady,’ Arundel told.

He and a sailor took Catherine up, legs first, heaved her to the railing, where strong arms drew her to the deck of the other ship. Catherine saw Talbot had not moved from his position of command.

The servants, men-at-arms, delegates from the Flemish cities, the English guards and the Flemish guards, sick, wet, exhausted, horrified, in shock, shaking and gesticulating, succeeded in changing ships. They crouched on the other deck. The chests with the belongings of Arundel and Catherine were lying spread out over the deck.

‘Push those cases below deck,’ Master Talbot ordered, ‘we are leaving the *Hermes*!’

Talbot’s crew undid the boarding hooks they had thrown to the *Hermes*, and which had tied the two ships together. The sea widened rapidly between Talbot’s ship and the *Hermes*.

‘The horses!’ Catherine cried.

‘Impossible!’ Arundel replied.

He fell with feet and hands on deck. ‘We could not possibly save them!’

‘On to Brest!’ Master Talbot shouted.

The wind fell much, then.

The *Scarlet Rose* was Master Andrew Talbot’s cog. He had sailed in the neighbourhood of the *Hermes*, being the victim of the wind and waves as much as the *Hermes*, had tried avoid bumping into her, and then he had seen the other ship being pinned on the rocks of Petit Litrin. He had hesitated a moment or two, but then he had resolutely decided to rescue the crew of the *Hermes*.

Hours later, Catherine de Coster stood at the railing of the *Rose*, dressed in other, more or less dry robes, hair undone and hanging loose to her shoulders. She was studying the lines of the

city of Brest that rose out of the fog of the afternoon after the storm. The sea continued to be wild, but Catherine felt the bay sheltered them.

Master Julian stood next to her, gloomily staring in front of him.

Catherine said, 'I'm sorry you lost your ship, Master Julian. Your crew and we all are saved. Isn't that the most important after such a storm?'

'I am sorry too,' Julian nodded. 'She was a fine ship. I'll have another one! I own two other cogs, you know, and I built up a reserve. I'm glad to be alive. This was one of the worst storms I've sailed in, my lady. Like I told you, these waters humble a man! I'll come back here, though.'

'I lost two ships already in storms like that one,' Master Talbot consoled. 'Five travels to and fro between England and Guyenne buy a new ship! I pity the master who has only one ship and sees that disappear in the waves. You'll survive, Julian!'

'By god, I will!' Julian cheered up.

'A pretty lass you are, my lady,' Talbot appreciated Catherine. 'I've not yet met a woman who seemed to want to tame the sea like you, standing on the bow castle of the *Hastings Hermes*, conjuring the waves. Are you a mermaid perhaps? Well, I met Jeanne de Belleville once, and she was as daring a woman as I bet you are! She too was a tamer of seas! First and only female privateer I ever laid eyes on! A fierce woman! Pretty too, she was!'

Julian agreed. 'Fine woman, Jeanne, the best pilot of Brittany!'

Catherine couldn't ask anymore who Jeanne de Belleville was, and what that woman had done to win the respect of the two seamen. She was too exhausted. Richard Arundel sat a little farther on deck, sicker than ever. Catherine pitied him.

'May I ask where your lodgings are in Brest, my lady?' Talbot informed.

Catherine smiled. Had she remained in Brest, she might have expected a visit of Andrew Talbot.

'I have a mission to King Edward of England to fulfil,' Catherine told. 'I heard the king was at Vannes. How do I get there?'

Talbot and Julian exchanged a glance.

'The king is indeed laying siege to Vannes, now,' Talbot knew. 'How might you get to Vannes? Let me think!'

'I'd like to reach Hennebont, talk to the Duchess of Montfort.'

Andrew Talbot looked again at Catherine with interest.

He said, 'she is Flemish too, isn't she, the lady Montfort. Well, if I were you, I'd ride to Landerneau, then to Pleyben, to Gourin, Rosparden, Quimperlé, and then Hennebont is near. Much faster to Vannes would be to take a ship to Auray! Vannes is very near Auray. The roads are not safe in Brittany. The sea route is safer and faster.'

'I'm done with ships for a while,' Catherine managed to grin. 'Safer? Faster? I'll travel by land, thank you. Can you make me a drawing of the roads leading to the villages you indicated?'

'Of course,' Talbot agreed. 'I'll copy, roughly, a map of Brittany I have. Anybody in Brest will take you to Hennebont, for a fee, of course!'

'Are you sailing to Auray, Master Talbot?'

'I'm very sorry, my lady, but I'm not! I have a cargo on board and have to take that further south. I am bound for Bordeaux. Your friend, Sir Arundel, has asked to accompany me. Now there is a man who knows how to suffer! I have heard he is a fearless warrior, but he is not a sailor! He is a courageous devil, though.'

Catherine, Julian and Talbot could still laugh, watching Arundel's misery. Talbot had suffered damage to his ship. He would need a few days for repairs at Brest.

While Catherine de Coster had been travelling to England and Brittany, John duke of Normandy, the son and heir of King Philip VI of France, marched the army of France to Brittany. This happened at the end of 1342. He led an army of French knights that was twice as large as King Edward's force. King Edward stopped his campaign of the conquest of territories of Brittany that had chosen for Charles de Blois. He paused, because of the winter, and also because John of Normandy stopped and passed the cold, humid Breton winter in his camp. The winter was so bad-weathered, that both armies were discouraged. King Edward still laid siege to Vannes.

The pope intervened in the conflict between the two kings, so that both parties agreed to talk about a truce. Negotiations began in Malestroit, a small town of Brittany, not far from Josselin.

The guards in Catherine's company needed two days to recover from their ordeal and sufferings at sea. Catherine had still enough Florins to buy new horses and a small wagon. Three days after having arrived at Brest, her small group rode out of the town gates. Catherine carried a rough sketch of these parts of Brittany, courtesy of Master Talbot, and she found a Breton man who had to travel south and promised to guide them by the shortest route to Hennebont. He would leave them before they would reach the castle, but he would bring them very near.

Three more days later, Catherine and John de Coster stopped their horses in front of the Hennebont castle, a huge fortified site, a village and a castle surrounded by imposing walls. They asked to see the Duchess of Montfort, announcing Catherine de Coster.

Jeanne de Montfort, Joanna for the English, received them in her hall. She was a stout woman with a rude but interesting, angular face, gleaming blue eyes, a hard laugh, a coarse voice, not very elegant in clothes and words, but warm-hearted.

Joanna wanted first to know where the visitors had come from, and then only did she ask who they were. She continued speaking French even when Catherine told her she had travelled from Flanders, from Ghent. When Catherine explained how she had arrived at Hennebont, notwithstanding a shipwreck near Molène, Joanna's eyes began to sparkle. She wanted to know all about that adventure.

At the end, she said, 'Catherine de Coster you are! Are you then James van Artevelde's wife?' 'I am,' Catherine proudly acknowledged, fearing the Duchess would then throw her out of her castle.

She continued, 'I am in Brittany on a mission of embassy to King Edward of England. I have delegates from Ghent, Bruges and Ieper with me! I can present you with letters from Ghent and from the earl of Arundel to prove my credentials.'

'And a woman leads a mission over two seas? Have the Flemish then no man of enough courage? You are a woman to my heart, Lady Catherine! What could we, women, not do that a man can do? Welcome, welcome, Catherine van Artevelde! I'll give you an escort to King Edward. A stronger escort you'll need, for French warriors still roam between here and Vannes. Come, let dinner be served! You must be ravenous, and your men even more.'

Jeanne de Montfort gave Catherine five of her best sergeants, excellent guides for the journey to Vannes over Auray. Catherine's group was now composed of about a dozen armed men,

quite sufficient to deter small groups of marauding bandits or French warriors on the roads. Three days later, she arrived at Vannes.

At Vannes, Catherine de Coster found John Lenvall from Ieper, who had sailed from Dunkirk to Sandwich, and who had then immediately boarded another ship for Brest. Peter Ternincmaker from Bruges had been sent to Plymouth from London, and he too went on land eventually at Brest. Both men arrived after Catherine at Vannes, but only few days later. They had sailed from Brest to Auray. Their sea-voyages had been far less adventurous. Catherine immediately asked to talk to the king. She and her escort were brought to an abbey where the king resided for most of the time during the siege of Vannes. When Catherine arrived, the king was at the siege. The stewards of the king, knowing well who Catherine de Coster was, provided her with lodgings. The delegates of Flanders too received rooms in the abbey, in another wing. The guards of the Duchess of Montfort took their leave. The Flemish guards received tents outside the abbey buildings.

King Edward III arrived two days later at the abbey. He immediately sent for Catherine, and Catherine alone. He received her in his rooms, and when Catherine stepped through the door, he opened his arms.

Only on the fourth day could an official meeting be arranged between the delegates from Flanders and King Edward. The delegates, by John de Coster, explained they would like to know when the king hoped to start paying the promised sums. They explained the finances of their towns had ended the year with important deficits.

The king sighed. The men from Ghent, Bruges and Ieper also stated the Flemish cities had readied an army. Flanders was quite prepared to attack France, preferable in Artois, with the aid of the king of England.

Edward had already spoken with Catherine about these issues, and had agreed with her on how he could answer. For his debts, the king announced he would order about one hundred forty thousand pounds to be paid to the cities. He had prepared enough bales of wool for Bruges to cover his debts with the merchants of that town and with the *Hanse* of London, the traders' association of Bruges. The faces of the delegates brightened.

As to the war, King Edward announced he was negotiating a truce with France by the good services of the cardinal-envoys of the pope of Avignon. These negotiations were under way at Malestroit, here, in Brittany. A truce was in the making at Malestroit, which made further campaigns in Artois superfluous. The Lady Catherine would act as the king's counsellor during the following weeks, and she would ensure the Flemish could bring their demands to the conference. The king then told the delegates they could of course join Catherine de Coster in the meetings at Malestroit, meet and talk with the cardinals, expose their arguments. The king wanted Catherine de Coster to be the spokeswoman of Flanders.

The next day already, Catherine joined the king of England in a party of horsemen that sped to Malestroit. The Flemish delegates followed a day later. The delegates thereafter rarely saw the king, but Catherine saw the king each day for the next three weeks, until the Truce of Malestroit was signed.

The final agreement between France and England, not a definite peace but a longer-lasting truce, was signed in the presence of the two kings as the Truce of Malestroit on the nineteenth of January of 1343 in the Chapel of Saint Mary Magdalene of the town. Catherine de Coster witnessed the signing.

The two kings promised to send embassies to Avignon to negotiate a lasting peace to their conflict, and to end all hostilities until the Day of Saint Michael of 1346. The truce signed included also the cessation of conflict for Scotland, Flanders and Hainault. Even if these countries decided on their own to break the truce and begin warring before 1346, the truce between the kings would not automatically be ended.

Catherine de Coster had to return to Flanders. King Edward gave her the choice to return by ship or over land. She chose to ride. King Edward provided her with an additional escort of ten men-at-arms and twenty mounted archers, who would accompany her as far as the end of the territories he controlled. Catherine wore letters of King Edward and of King Philip of Valois allowing her to travel in their lands. She travelled back to Flanders in January of 1343.

King Edward returned to England that same month of January, but he left garrisons in the Montfort fortresses under the command of Sir Thomas Dagworth.

The van Steenbeke Accusation

The Truce of Malestroit of January 1343, was duly respected by the king of France as far as Flanders was concerned. After all, Flanders was the fief of his loyal vassal, Louis of Nevers. The border remained quiet. The king ordered no major military actions against Flanders. In the beginning of February 1343 therefore, the Flemish cities recalled the troops they had stationed in Bergen, Cassel and Gravelines, about eight thousand men in all.

The Flemish knights who had been banished also did not stir up new revolts against the policy of James van Artevelde. James van Artevelde had only to make sure the *Leliaert* knights who had remained in Flanders did not cause major revolts. The aldermen and captains of the cities watched them closely, and van Artevelde also organised more and better spies in their circles, a network of informants.

The Truce of Malestroit had confirmed that the men who had joined King Philip in the war against the Flemish cities remained banished, their properties confiscated on their return. The finances of Ghent therefore ameliorated rapidly from the sale of those properties.

Count Louis of Nevers had left Flanders at the end of 1342. His negative influence and the impact of his intrigues diminished, so a relative, uneasy peace, more a cessation of hostilities than a real peace, was restored between Flanders and its neighbouring counties. Production and trade flourished.

Ser John van Steenbeke was the exponent of an old family of *poorters* of Ghent. His family had since always been involved in the government of the city as aldermen. John had been an alderman himself from August 1338 to August 1339, the year James van Artevelde had come to prominence, and James considered him as one of his loyal followers. Also in the next years, John van Steenbeke had served the city and van Artevelde well. James had proposed him as a member of the newly installed Council of Flanders that had to accompany Count Louis's government of the county in the autumn of 1339, and the next year John got elected as dean of the weavers. When Count Louis of Nevers returned to Flanders after the signing of the Truce

of Esplechin, van Steenbeke had negotiated with the count, together with other delegates of the city. That had happened in November of 1340, mainly because from October 1340 to Mid-August of 1341 John had been a receiver of the city of Ghent, a function that had been considered important by James van Artevelde. John had also shown some merit in appeasing the smaller cities that revolted against the privileges of the three large cities. During these actions he had proved a loyal servant of the new regime in Ghent, opposed to the count and the king of France. He had been appointed as receiver of Ghent again from August 1342 on, a function he could normally occupy until Mid-August of 1343.

In that period, from August 1342 to December of that year, Count Louis of Nevers had briefly returned to Flanders, agreed to the policy of the three large cities, but realising he was still being mauled by the Council and cut his wings by James van Artevelde. The count had lost all power over his county, had to agree with what the large cities dictated him, the policies inspired by James van Artevelde. He rapidly left Flanders again.

In the beginning of 1343, troubles rose in Aardenburg, a small town the industry of which had been much diminished by the exclusive privileges of nearby Bruges on the production of quality cloth. For once, James van Artevelde himself rode with a force of militiamen to Aardenburg. He found out who had fomented the uprising, and he killed the nobleman Peter Lammins who could be suspected of having prepared the rebellion. Lammins had not appeared to be judged by a court of aldermen of Aardenburg or of Bruges, so James van Artevelde took justice himself.

From various other places of the westerly regions of Flanders, complaints against James van Artevelde's use or misuse of force against partisans of the count of Flanders were sent to Ghent. The territory beyond the river IJzer had always remained rather tumultuous, the influence of the lords of the castellanies there strong in the essentially rural community. The secret agitations and intrigues of the count were most palpable in the *Westhoek*. James van Artevelde had not been in person in those regions, negotiating and fighting, but he had supported the men delegated by Ghent with the aim of pacifying the land, even when they had applied a too heavy hand in his taste.

When somebody had gained power over a city or a territory of Flanders, he had to face envy and opposition by people who wanted to pull down his power.

When a man received power over other men who reigned by the naturel order of tradition, such as Count Louis of Nevers had, the envy and opposition had to remain weak. How could anybody, born a knight or born an artisan, contest the designation of a man chosen to rule by God and by the king? Count Louis had a natural authority that was firmly anchored in the society of all men of Flanders, and authority that van Artevelde could not claim.

James van Artevelde, not afflicted with any such natural authority but his charisma, had therefore constantly to defend his position, being more open and vulnerable to counter-attacks and criticism. The men of the Pharaïldis group might have persuaded James van Artevelde to step down from his power at this moment, the main objectives of the installation of the new policy realised, but the Pharaïldis men had receded in the shadows, and James van Artevelde did not reflect any more on when he should or would step down. He was in command of Flanders, though he wore no other fine title than head captain of Ghent, and he probably thought he could occupy that function till the end of his days. He was so much occupied by the demands of the moment, the decision of action after action, that he did not have sufficient time to think about the future. He seemed not really to care about the future, either! He seemed not to care about what would happen after him, after his remaining in power. The

mere fact that he didn't, made the members of influential families of Ghent, who did worry a lot about the future of their fortunes, live and act in wonder and in envy of the power James van Artevelde wielded. John van Steenbeke fed the uncertainty, the fear and the doubts of these men.

John van Steenbeke was ambitious, a knight proud of being of noble birth, proud of being a member of an ancient *poorter* landowner family, a man with a keen sense of history. Because of his descent, he felt he had a duty to accomplish great deeds in Ghent, as well as the right to become one of the most powerful men in the city, if not the most powerful. What right had the lowly-born James van Artevelde to wield the power of the militiamen of Ghent and Flanders? James van Artevelde had no birth-right to claim such an authority!

Except for the greed for power, John van Steenbeke was not particularly a supporter of count or king, or whoever else. His loyalty was to himself and his ambitions alone. James van Artevelde was the most powerful man in Ghent. If John van Steenbeke was to become the most powerful man, James van Artevelde had to be torn from his pedestal. Count and king would be grateful, and John van Steenbeke could fulfil his destiny.

The issue John van Steenbeke had was the thought that when you attack a lion, you had better expect receiving a few blows of the lion's claws, and James van Artevelde had shown more than once a stroke of his claw could be deadly. Van Artevelde could still count on a strong following of wealthy, intelligent and courageous, loyal supporters, such as the formidable van Vaernewijc brothers, and the van Lens family members, and many more. One did not attack a lion frontally! One weakened him at the sides and at the back, danced around him and struck when the lion was weakened and looking the other way. Van Steenbeke did just that, nevertheless wondering when the lion, van Artevelde, would be weak enough also to be attacked from the front, to finish the animal.

John van Steenbeke, being insufficiently intelligent to be patient, too impetuous and impulsive of character, attacked a little too early.

Wiser men waited and watched, interested in how and when and whether John van Steenbeke would dare stage an assault on the fortress van Artevelde.

Van Steenbeke began by launching campaign after campaign of rumours, aimed at breaking James van Artevelde's reputation of the wise man who could not be defeated. The rumours were spread by himself and by his friends.

The rumours sounded subversive, proposed in question mode, containing a seed of truth and fact and a seed of lies, never formulated as open contestation of acts, always vague and open, never pronounced head-on, never really accusing.

Was it true James van Artevelde and his family were outrageously rich? Where had that wealth originated from?

Might it be true van Artevelde had supported the English king for money?

Could it be possible the English king would depose Count Louis of Nevers once he, Edward, had become king of France, and then found a new dynasty of counts from the van Artevelde family? Such a change was not unthinkable, was it not?

In principle, James van Artevelde had to submit and abide by the rulings of the aldermen, but did he not rule the aldermen by the force of his troops, the very militia of Ghent?

James van Artevelde walked around in Ghent accompanied by more than twenty heavily armed guards. Was it not nearer fifty guards? Who then would dare to confront James and tell him what he should do? Opposing van Artevelde meant certain death! Was he not a ruthless, pitiless, violent man?

Did van Artevelde not act like a dictator of old, killing men arbitrarily, without waiting for a judgement from the *paysierders* or from the aldermen of the Law?

Had van Artevelde really accomplished so much? Had it not been the aldermen who had signed treaties, peace treaties and truces, gotten charters of free commerce for Ghent?

Had it not been the aldermen who had negotiated for all the good things that had come to Ghent?

Was it not time Ghent reverted to its lawful government, to the power of the aldermen, especially of the aldermen chosen from the best families of Ghent, men who had the skills of negotiation and the wisdom needed to govern?

The campaigns of rumours spread in Ghent lasted. James van Artevelde remained unaware of the gossips against his person, the slander against his character, and as he thought he was still at the acme of his prestige and popularity, he probably would not have cared had he been made aware. He did not hear the rumours and the rumours were not reported to him.

The Pharaïldis men heard the gossip, told one another, 'it has begun!' but they too did not react otherwise than by calling the rumours untrue and nonsensical.

John van Steenbeke made his main move during a meeting of the aldermen, deans, captains and receivers of Ghent in mid-January of 1343.

After a boring, dreary, quite routine session of the aldermen, John van Steenbeke was scheduled to present the accounts of the city. While he presented the figures, he suddenly switched to a virulent attack on James van Artevelde, the head captain.

'You must have realised, lords aldermen, the accounts of Ghent suffer from the management by James van Artevelde! Large sums of money should have entered the accounts of the city, but have been withheld. Huge sums promised by King Edward and other sums spent for the king, have simply disappeared into the private gold chests of our head captain! Van Artevelde has deliberately used money of Ghent to strengthen his grip on the town and on the countryside. We have received no justification on what the sums have been used for, except to install the dictatorship of our head captain in Flanders. The amounts spent in the war, have they not been over-estimated and overly spent? In fact, the captain has reneged on the oaths he swore solemnly before the assembled aldermen, to serve the city. James van Artevelde has misused the money of Ghent to further his own particular interests, to grab and consolidate power over Ghent, and subdue you, the aldermen of our venerable city, by terror, fear of violence and intimidation!'

John van Steenbeke rolled on, shouting arguments and allegations without being silenced.

James van Artevelde had sat, dozing, on a bench next to William van Vaernewijc and Joseph Aper when John van Steenbeke began his diatribe. He was instantly awake and alert, wondering what had come into the mind of that fool of a van Steenbeke today. He listened, astonished every second a little more by the flood of allegations launched openly against him. James's anger at the pandemonium that broke loose in the honourable hall grew to the ceiling by those seconds. He was being insulted! James needed a few moments to gather his wits, believing John van Steenbeke was experiencing a stroke of madness. James's natural reaction was to wait a little longer to hear and see who would support the orator, and who would be scandalised by the invectives of the honourable Ser van Steenbeke. He heard little support for his actions.

The knights Peter Damman, John and Solomon Borluut, members of the most distinguished families of Ghent – the Borluuts had led the contingents of Ghent warriors at the Battle of the

Golden Spurs of 1302 – added instead of horrified exclamations new accusations to the sudden insults of John van Steenbeke!

‘You are a dictator, and dictators must be imprisoned and banished from our town,’ Peter Damman shouted, pointing a long, accusing finger at James van Artevelde.

The accusation was too much! James van Artevelde stood from his bench, shouting higher than van Steenbeke and Damman, ‘you are mad fools, infamous liars and deceivers! I have used all funds to our just cause. What proof have you? My expenses have been accounted for, and I have withheld no money. You can check that in the ledgers of the town, van Steenbeke, if you can read and understand them! You are a despicable traitor!’

‘And who keeps these ledgers, who controls the inscriptions?’ John van Steenbeke cried. ‘Is it not Catherine de Coster, your wife, who commands what is entered into the accounts?’

‘My fortune has not grown with money from Ghent or from England!’ James van Artevelde threw in the hall. ‘On the contrary, I gave huge sums to Ghent and to the king, not the other way round! I used my own money to pay troops, more than once! You are a miserable liar! You deserve to be killed!’

The aldermen, deans, receivers and captains stood in the hall. They gesticulated and shouted all at the same time, pointing fingers and fists, slapping away hands.

The shouting grew so hard that the guards who stood outside at the doors became nervous, wondering what was going on inside the hall. They looked at each other with frightened eyes. Should they intervene?

It was forbidden to wear weapons openly in Ghent, and most of the aldermen did not even carry daggers during their meetings, but the captains were armed. James van Artevelde wore a sword at his side. He too stood near the bench he had been seated on moments ago, but now he slowly stepped forward, and the aldermen made way.

John van Steenbeke paled. He knew and feared he impulsive anger of James van Artevelde. He feared being killed in the hall of the aldermen. He was right in his fears, for James van Artevelde moved ever forward, right hand on the hilt of his sword, left hand on the scabbard, wild eyes and tight lips, anger masking all other feelings and reasoning. James stood beyond reason. He had been insulted, he could kill! He was ready to draw and use his weapon. He did feel a hand of Gelnoot van Lens on his arm, but scarlet rage only was in his eyes. John van Steenbeke ran from those vengeful eyes. He ran to the doors behind him, drew open the panels, and burst out of the room. James van Artevelde then ran behind the man, although many arms tried to keep him back.

‘Don’t pursue him, James,’ William van Vaernewijc shouted, ‘he is not worth killing! Don’t bloody your sword on that worm!’

Also Gelnoot van Lens and other aldermen held James back.

In the meantime, while the pandemonium of shouts and gestures lasted in the hall, John van Steenbeke ran to his house. James van Artevelde, who had also run out of the aldermen’s hall, saw his enemy run through the streets. Wielding his naked sword, he pursued van Steenbeke. When the man hid in his house, van Artevelde slammed his fists on the closed door, shouting, ‘come out, you coward, and defend yourself!’

Van Artevelde was by then accompanied by his guards, almost twenty armed men, and by a few aldermen, friends and captains, who tried to calm him.

Van Steenbeke opened a window and shouted, ‘to arms, to arms! Death to the dictator!’

James van Artevelde had an inclination to throw his sword, point forward, in the face of the traitor, but Gelnoot held back his arm.

At that moment arrived a large group of aldermen of the Law, led by Maes van Vaernewijc. They did not want riots in Ghent! James had to admit one should not encourage armed conflicts in the confines of the city walls. Van Vaernewijc agreed to the senselessness of the allegations of John van Steenbeke. He promised to James the aldermen would make an inquiry, judge and punish John van Steenbeke, but James van Artevelde understood the inquiry would also be on him. He calmed slowly. He realised he could accomplish nothing in the street, in front of van Steenbeke's house, so he and a growing group of guards headed for his own house in the *Kalanderberg*.

While James returned home, the sign had been given by the co-conspirators of van Steenbeke to assemble their followers in the Friday Market of Ghent. The crowd of armed men grew thicker, and from there they marched in arms to the aldermen's hall, shouting they recognised only as their leader the count of Flanders. They demanded from the aldermen to fire James van Artevelde as captain and to force his friends and supporters to wear a special sign, so that these men could be recognised as supporters of the dictator, be thus stigmatised, singled out and refused any public office. The conspirators of the van Steenbeke accusation formed a private militia in front of the aldermen's hall, ready to grab power in Ghent by arms.

When the *Leliaerts*, the men who had remained loyal to the count, the friends of the Borluuts, the Dammans and the van Steenbekes, had assembled in arms, another grumbling could be heard in the streets of Ghent. From every alley and street and from every house, men bearing weapons ran to James van Artevelde. The deans and the militia of the sixteen crafts of Ghent, banners flying, weapons glimmering, gathered around him in the *Kalanderberg*. James accompanied them to the Friday Market, from where the partisans of van Steenbeke had disappeared a few moments earlier. James van Artevelde then stood on one side of the Friday Market, touched by the display of faith and support of thousands of men. The men arrived constantly, many in mail coats, armed with *goedendags*, crossbows, swords and shields. They placed themselves in ranks in the Friday Market in discipline, but shouting 'Artevelde! Vrijheid en nering!' for freedom and crafts. They readied for a terrible massacre to be inflicted on the knights and on the men who had gathered shouting the infamous 'count and king!'

James van Artevelde refused a massacre in Ghent that afternoon, though one word of him would have been enough. He thanked the men, told them to wait and stay calm, to return home but to remain vigilant. He then asked Maes and William van Vaernewijc to go to the aldermen's hall and to hear what had been decided there. Maes van Vaernewijc had seen the imposing display of power. He wondered how he could save Ghent from bloodbath. When the craftsmen in arms returned home, James van Artevelde also walked back home.

Maes van Vaernewijc was the alderman with the most prestige in Ghent. He ran back to the aldermen's hall, closing the gate to the arriving crowd of armed men. He shouted from a window the men should disperse or face judgement. A little later, he stated the aldermen refused the outrageous demands of the *Leliaerts* and of the supporters of John van Steenbeke. The aldermen threatened calling together the militia of Ghent to disperse the crowd and punish everyone who remained in the street. The conspirators, Peter Damman and the Borluuts, then asked everybody to go home peacefully.

The aldermen remained in meeting. Maes van Vaernewijc defended James van Artevelde, calling it preposterous that van Artevelde should have stolen money of the town. The

discussions ran high. Maes could not avoid that the aldermen decided on a trial, an enquiry into the allegations of John van Steenbeke.

‘Wait!’ Maes van Vaernewijc shouted. ‘You cannot destroy the reputation of the captain-in-chief of Ghent and of the leader of the cities of Flanders this way! I refuse to have James van Artevelde be imprisoned to stand trial. What we can do is send Ser John van Steenbeke to the count’s castle, to prison indeed, for insults to a captain. In view of the function and the services of James van Artevelde to our town, we must tell our captain we would like him to be our honoured and protected guest, hold him under the protection of Ghent!’

The aldermen agreed, but wondered where they could keep James van Artevelde under guard. Not in the *Gravensteen*, not in the count’s hands!

Maes van Vaernewijc had already a proposal, ‘we could send James van Artevelde to the *Gerard de Duivel Steen*, the house and castle of Gerard the Devil! It will be easy to protect and guard James there, and he will not be in a prison, but live as our guest.’

This proposal was accepted. The aldermen called a large group of militiamen to them, and these marched to fetch John van Steenbeke to imprison him in the *Gravensteen*, which was also a way of protecting him, for the *Gravensteen* was the count’s inviolate domain, the count being represented by the bailiff.

James van Artevelde passed the evening under guard. He had accepted to be brought to the *Gerard de Duivel Steen*. He knew he was imprisoned in a golden cage, but a cage nevertheless, however respectful the aldermen had been. Maes van Vaernewijc had come to talk with James in his house. Maes had succeeded in persuading James to accompany him to the *Steen*, not far from the *Kalanderberg*.

Bitterness nevertheless filled James van Artevelde’s heart and mind. His world had crumbled around him in the time of a few hours. One moment he had been the master of Ghent, the next he sat in prison. Why had he allowed Maes to do that? James van Artevelde refused that day to understand what was happening to him, his mind a blank. He had to absorb the shock first, and the emotions of being placed in custody like a powerless criminal. He had to think!

The peace returned to Ghent during the evening. The opposing groups of armed men dispersed. The next day also passed in relative calm, though shouts could be heard in the streets for and against van Artevelde.

James van Artevelde despaired in his rooms, but he forced himself to reflect in clear and logical terms about what had happened.

Events took an unexpected turn the next day.

The friends of James van Artevelde, mainly his captains, informed their colleagues of Flanders about what had happened in Ghent. They asked for support.

On the eighth of January of 1343, a very large contingent of troops from Bruges set up camp at the main gates of Ghent.

Three days later, more troops of militiamen from Ieper joined them.

A little later still, a multitude of smaller detachments of militia in arms from Oudenaarde, Dendermonde, Kortrijk, Diksmuide, from the cities of the *Land van Waas*, from the *Vier Ambachten*, the Four Crafts, and from other smaller entities, arrived at the walls of Ghent. They shouted ‘Artevelde! Artevelde!’ and threatened to enter the city to free James van Artevelde.

The militiamen surrounded Ghent and did not allow a living soul to enter or to leave the town.

Ghent was besieged!

Again, Maes van Vaernewijc took it upon him to talk with and calm all parties. He urged the aldermen to judge rapidly and to take into account what was threatening outside the walls of the town. He went to parlay with the captains of Bruges and Ieper, asking them to take a few days of patience and not start rash skirmishes that might lead to hundreds of men killed. The Flemish militia of the three largest cities should not war on each other! He spoke with the captains of Ghent, who had placed themselves at the head of the militia of the craftsmen and asked them also to wait for the judgement and the probable release of their beloved leader. He sought the partisans of van Steenbeke. These had barricaded themselves in fear inside the *Gravensteen*. They were less numerous day by day, so they too accepted Maes's arguments to wait.

The parties inside and outside Ghent agreed on patience.
A stalemate had developed in and around Ghent.

Near the van Steenbeke house remained a few hundred guards consisting of knight-*poorters* and their servants, in arms and with their banners proudly open. In the Friday Market and in the *Bijloke* field waited still many more hundreds of craftsmen, ready to call immediately thousands of friends. They stood in mail coats, rested their shields on the ground, held their *goedendags* upright, shouted once every while, 'Artevelde! Artevelde' thundering over the town. The low rhythms of their cries could be heard as far as the belfry and the town hall. All around Ghent, thousands of Flemish militiamen camped in tents, playing with cards and dice, but waiting for a sign of the man they acknowledged as their leader, James van Artevelde.

Meanwhile, James van Artevelde lived like a prince in the House of Gerard the Devil. He was not really imprisoned, lived in fine quarters, dined like the best potentates of the city, but he couldn't leave the house. In fact, he could have left at any instant, and his guards would have followed him! His gaolers begged him to stay inside the *Steen*, and he indulged them. He had not yet decided what he should do. He received visitors, so that at almost every hour of the day four or five men sat with him in the hall of the house, discussing with him. When he heard what was happening outside, James grinned and laughed, slapped his knee, and he became more relaxed by the hour. He understood clearly, however, how precarious his position was. Never had he been in a situation in which his destiny had depended from other people with similar poignancy.

James's first reaction, and then his constant urge, had been to want to run out of the Steen, pushing his guards away and ordering them to follow him, to call on all his supporters and grab total power violently. He wanted once and for all to destroy the power of the knights, of the *Leliaerts* and of the count's cronies in a terrible bloodbath. He could crush them like a rotten apple in his hand, now, and establish himself as the supreme lord of Ghent and of Flanders. Could he not be the spokesman of a republic, such as the spokesman of the Italian republics? Why could such a form of government not succeed in Flanders when it had in Tuscany? He could lead sensible policies by a government chosen by the people of the cities! The temptation to break with everything tradition and customs dictated him hung strong on his mind.

The issue was: if he could do away with the past, were his fellowmen ready to make the same leap? He thought they were, for he was well aware of the armed troops that stood at the walls of Ghent. Should he throw the dice, choose everything or nothing? John van Steenbeke had tried to grab power. Why should he not do the same? He had the means! The only person who

could withhold James van Artevelde from grabbing total power now was James van Artevelde, no one else!

Among the visitors of James van Artevelde were also Raes van Lake the Elder and Gillis Vresele, the main representatives of the Pharaïldis group. They arrived late in day and hour, but they came. James had been expecting them for several days, but the Pharaïldis men seemed to have hesitated, enhancing his bitterness, and when they came, it was late in the afternoon, almost evening, when all his visitors had left.

‘They came like thieves in the night,’ James thought, sad and bitter.

He had craved for their advice. What he had heard from his colleagues and other friends were mostly only the release of emotions, of excited thinking. He longed for the calculation of possibilities, for calm and cold reasoning, for rational thinking. Only the Pharaïldis men were thus dedicated to reason and could be trusted!

Raes van Lake and Gillis Vresele arrived with several servants carrying baskets with wine, the finest bread of Ghent, oatcakes, new and fresh vegetables, fowl, the best food to be had in town, courtesy also of Wouter de Smet, Arnout de Hert and Peter Denout. Gillis and Raes showed it all proudly to James van Artevelde, as if they were the magi of the west and the east, bringing the signs of the homage of the world to James as to Jesus, the ruler of the universe. When James made the comparison, Gillis and Raes laughed heartily. But they exchanged meaningful glances and James remarked they suddenly seemed worried.

‘You have come to pay a visit to convict, to a prisoner,’ James began.

The Pharaïldis men grasped the sarcastic, bitter tone of the voice instantly.

‘Oh come now,’ Raes consoled. ‘You’ll be out of here in a couple of days! You are treated like a prince in the *Steen*. Isn’t everybody nice to you? How do you think the aldermen of the Law will vote in your case? Half of them would run through fire for you, some have done exactly that. The other half look anxiously to the banners of the craftsmen in front of their windows, and to the banners of the army of Flanders at the walls of the city. Those two forces are ready to tear Ghent apart. Relax! You’ll step out of that door in a few days, head high, thousands cheering you. Relax and rest. Use the time to think and to plan your next moves.’

Raes had remained the man who went immediately to the bottom of matters.

‘You left me alone,’ James stated. ‘You abandoned me. You haven’t spoken to me in weeks, months. Where have you been? I thought we were family.’

Gillis replied, ‘we never abandoned you, James. Do you remember what we said when all this started? We told you we knew how it began, but we didn’t know how it would end. We have thought a long time ago you should somehow end your supremacy over Ghent and Flanders. We had an aim together, remember? The aim was to get wool back to Flanders, and ensure Ghent could trade freely with its neighbouring lands. For that, our town and Flanders had to declare neutral in the conflict between the kings. That was what we decided to do. Well, you have realised the aims already many months ago. Nobody can now end the policy that was so beneficial for Flanders. The two kings agreed to continue the policy, and the count is mauled by the Council of Flanders. You could have stopped a long time ago, withdrawn from official life. Why haven’t you? We have not abandoned you, James, you should know that. But you outran us, to distances, goals, heights of power to where we could not follow you! You were and are still on the brink of overthrowing the basis of our society, so far have you dashed forward! You went a lot farther than we ever wanted to go. We cannot follow you any longer, for the road you walk on is too new, too dangerous, too radically different from everything we

know and can grasp, James. The question we have and for which we have no answer is whether you have a clear vision of the future, of what you want to accomplish, and whether that vision, if it is clear to you, is feasible for a majority of men in our county. It seems to us you may have a clear vision, but if it is what we think, then we doubt we can follow you, and we doubt the vision is acceptable to the great majority of Flemish and of the *Gentenaars*!

‘You speak in not very clear terms,’ James van Artevelde laughed, ‘but I think I know what you mean. You think I have advanced a good way towards overthrowing the count and grabbing power over Flanders like a dictator. You think I want to install a regime centred on my person. In other words, you think I want to install either a republic or a dictatorship. In fact, you are saying the same thing as John van Steenbeke!’

The Pharaïldis men did not respond. They looked at the table.

‘Grabbing power is very futile, as you know as well as I, for the power would be reversed and would dissolve with my person,’ van Artevelde continued. ‘The truly important question is whether I can install a regime that is capable of lasting after my death, a regime that depends no more on the fatherly figure of a count reigning with supernatural power above us. We humans, we Flemish, need a fatherly figure so much, don’t we? Otherwise we are lost, alone, frightened. We seem to need a count as much as we need a God! If I would do away with the count, that would frighten all the good people to death. I would destroy a God! I would kill a father! We would all be orphans, wouldn’t we? Patricide is a crime, of course, and we would not be able to live without a father; we would be instantly looking for another father, wouldn’t we? Well, I could provide another father to our country, a nicer father.

I think these feelings are very childish! When shall we grow up in Flanders and realise we can take care of ourselves? We have done it in the cities, where we choose aldermen and rule by ourselves, so why couldn’t we do the same with a county, with the county of Flanders? The thought is revolutionary, and I am very much aware most of us are frightened at the thought of living like a fatherless child. Will Flanders and Ghent then never really grow up? You seem to quiver, you men of the past, but the thousands out there who shout at the walls of Ghent and stand in arms, seem to me to be quite prepared and ready to try something new, you know! Aren’t you, the Pharaïldis men and also the aldermen, deans, the wise and smart men of our town, weak in faith for our strength and values, weak in determination, tired in thinking, frightened and cowardly linked to the past? Aren’t you like children, small and weak?’

‘Maybe we fear indeed,’ Raes van Lake replied. ‘Yes, we fear the violence that must come by such a vision, the upheavals, the strives, the dangers for the good people of Ghent, for our families. The picture you have drawn, a land ruled by its inhabitants, by leaders chosen from the people, even if only among the best men, among the intelligent ones, the brave, the daring, the ruthless, might be feasible in a land isolated from the rest of the world. We are not isolated. As long as you let Flanders have a count, not much is really changed to the natural order of life. Counts and kings we had for centuries, and those are the heirs to the leaders of our tribes that came to live in these lands. Once you do away with the count, you will become a threat not only to France, from which Flanders will have to tear itself away from, but also for the rest of our world. Brabant, Hainault, Guelders, Jülich, Namur, all the lords of the lands around us, will look in astonishment at a new order that is opposed to their basis of rule. How do you think they will react? Our guess is they will remain polite and cautious at first, continue to fight among each other, but then they will unite and fight us with all their might, because our order would be opposed to theirs. Even the king of England will realise you will ultimately oppose him, for his order is equally opposed to your order. He only proposes an order that is a tiny alternative within the same. So I ask you, James van Artevelde, you may

realise a change in the order of things now and during your lifetime, but do you think you can change the order of things for generations to come? Who shall lead Flanders and Ghent the same way you did? What is the end you have in mind? If you don't have a clear idea, a very clear idea of what could happen still during your lifetime and certainly after your life, except war, destruction, tens of thousands of men and women killed, and if you have no idea how your intentions for Flanders could outlast you, what then is the use of pursuing?'

Raes van Lake had spoken calmly, relaxed, not excitedly, as if he were merely weighing the alternatives rationally.

Gillis Vresele added, 'there is worse, James. Dangers also lurk within! You have read books about the Greeks and the Romans. You know the political system of the *ecclesia* in Athens, the general assembly of citizens deciding on all matters of the state, sunk away in dictatorship, in oligarchies, a form like our organisation of aldermen was a good many years ago when the aldermen were chosen only from a select number of families. Athens lost the war to Sparta! The Roman republic gave way to the Julian Caesars, to the emperors, never to revert. The Italian city-states are gradually being dominated by one or a few families. Are you not afraid of the future, of the paths you are walking on? The new paths can lead to paradise or to hell, James! You had better be certain your paths lead to paradise, totally sure, for if you're not, you may be exposing Flanders and Ghent to unseen horrors, also from within. If there is only a small chance the path leads to hell, James, is then the prospect of an elusive paradise worth threading on?'

Gillis paused, but quickly continued before James van Artevelde could retort.

'I have to ask you the same question we discussed when we decided to send you to the *Bijloke* field on that long past Christmas of 1337. We know how it all started, many people would oppose us, and we still don't know when it will end and also not how it can end. I must tell you now, James, the Pharaïldis group has stopped walking on. We have stopped advancing. We like peace. We like freedom and the application of our crafts. We protect our families and we will do what is necessary to keep our beloved ones alive and well. We don't gamble with their lives, not now, not in the future! For us, the journey has ended. We will go no farther.'

'Are you not talking like washerwomen, afraid of their shadow, rejecting the absolutely plausible, own rule?' James hissed. 'Are you no cowards? Can you not fight like men, show you are men of honour, stand up for your dignity? How long do you think will it take before you will be slaves again?'

'Armed conflicts and the ensuing battles have always destroyed, James, rarely if ever built anything of importance. We are not willing to risk the lives and the well-being of the people we love, and we have decided your vision is dangerous and may lead to the destruction of Ghent and Flanders. The risk is too great, for the powers that will confront us are a hundred times stronger than we are. When an army faces destruction, it had better retreat and dissolve in the landscape, to come back when return is possible. One only fights when one has a very high chance to win, and a fight can come in many forms. Otherwise, one is merely being foolish. You must recognise the wisdom and the rationality of what we are saying! Think about it. Do our words penetrate to your mind? Do you realise the depth and the breadth of our words?'

'I do, I do,' James van Artevelde acquiesced, head bowed, 'but your words are the ideas of little people. You are proposing something that is alien to my nature. You are telling me I should give up, lie down like a puppy on my back, legs up. I am a man of honour and of courage. I am a loner, a lone wolf. Things might have seemed different to me had Agneete lived. Now, I have not much to lose! My children shall live on, whatever happens. Do you really expect me to give up, now, to bow abjectly to the count, after all the treason that man

has committed, to admit his rule is wise, to submit to his lords? I'd rather kill myself first! I have come too far, Gillis and Raes!'

'The count's authority has been limited. His rule was wrong. The count did not hold the interests of his county in his mind and care. He only looked to his own interests, probably because he wanted to be loved at the French court. That was a wrong thing to do for a monarch, and surely a crime in the eyes of God. We must continue to oppose such egoism. We do not question the fact we must continue to guard our charters and add to them to limit the absolute power of the counts,' Gillis explained.

Raes said then, 'we are asking questions about your objectives, James. Are you leading us towards some kind of republican rule for Flanders, then we believe that not to be feasible. We believe such a dream is doomed. Maybe it is possible far in the future, not now. There are too many and too violent tensions in our society, forcing us to believe such a government cannot be installed and if installed would not be viable in the long term. We ask you first to reflect on what we have said. Think about our proposition to halt your dream here. If another kind of rule than by count and king is not viable, how are you going to have Flanders return to a decent rule by count and king, remaining vigilant, of course, and still defending smartly the basic cause of freedom and crafts?'

'You are fine friends,' James van Artevelde exclaimed. 'You placed me in the forefront of contestation of established rule because of economic reasons. What I didn't realise, and you neither, was that we couldn't attain these goals without political power, total power. When we changed the policies of the count, we had to take power in our own hands, for it was the only means to reach our goals. The count has always waited behind a bend in the road to destroy us! I have the political power now, and I am not going to abandon it! The day I lose the political power over Ghent and Flanders, I will be killed. Nobody is going to let me live when I am out of power. My only alternative is then to leave the county, to find refuge in another country. I am not going to let myself be killed, my friends! I am going to hold on to power for as long as I can. I am going to hold power ruthlessly! The situation may change. The count may die and the new count may prove a more decent man, but all that is in the future. For now, I am not going to abandon power! I have advanced too far! There is no going back for me!'

'James, James, don't you see power calls for more power? To hold on to your power, you will have to create more power for you. All men in power who hold on to power become more and more ruthless, pitiless and dictatorial. Is that the spiral you are caught in and cannot leave? Why not let go of power smoothly?' Gillis Vresele proposed. 'Let power slowly dribble through your fingers like sand. Hand slice by slice of power back to the aldermen, retreat into the shadows. You will always be the wise man of Flanders. People will always come back to you in times of crisis. Your popularity has reached its acme today; keep it like that. Leave before it is too late! You might leave the county for a while and travel to England. King Edward owes you much, you know, and many men in Ghent will continue to protect you, for a long time still, until it is not necessary anymore. We, the Pharaïldis men, will protect you. In a crisis, we can smuggle you out.'

James van Artevelde grinned, 'when one starts relenting power, my friends, power collapses to nothing very rapidly. The moment I begin to abandon power and hand it over to others, that act will be regarded immediately as a fatal weakness, and the pack of wolves will concentrate on me and tear me apart. Power may come instantly; it is certain to be lost instantly!'

'Then run while it is still time,' Raes van Lake exclaimed. 'You are a trader! You can trade from anywhere!'

James van Artevelde had heard enough.

‘I thank you for the discussion,’ he concluded. ‘I am tired. I don’t know yet what I am going to do. I can strengthen my power, or I can on your suggestion start relenting it. I’ll think about that while I’m waiting here. There is no hurry for me to decide rapidly. The way I can work and rule over Flanders may last still a long time!’

Van Artevelde paused, seemed to reflect, but then he added, teeth grinding, ‘nevertheless, there is something I’d like you to whisper in the ears of the aldermen and the other men who think it is they who rule Ghent!’

‘What is that?’ Gillis asked.

Raes bowed nearer to James.

‘Tell the aldermen that if they decide in judging me to take power away from me, now, I shall crush them all! I shall unleash the hounds of hell, the militia of the crafts, and I shall call in the troops of Bruges and Ieper, have them enter the city and let them have their way with this damned city! Then, when I shall be back in full power, there will be no aldermen anymore in this city and I, James van Artevelde, will appoint who can govern the city and who not. Power is still mine, you see, Pharaïldis men, and nobody is going to take it away from me, not by any means! The power is mine, and it is mine to give. When I relent power, it will be by my own will or whim, by my own design, not by anybody else’s! Tell that to the aldermen! I give them one week, not one day more. The moment the aldermen condemn me to anything, I condemn them and Ghent at the same time! You, my friends, you had better flee to your manors and castles in the countryside by then!’

James van Artevelde’s eyes flickered wildly in the evening. Two guards brought in candle lights, for darkness fell rapidly in the hall. Gillis Vresele and Raes van Lake shrunk away from James van Artevelde. They looked at each other. The menace had been virulent. Yes, they had created a creature they no longer controlled. James van Artevelde had drawn his own lines, went on his own paths. They could in the future only watch as bystanders. Their role was finished with James.

Gillis Vresele and Raes van Lake sighed.

‘So be it,’ they said.

They still shook hands with James van Artevelde, then they left the Gerard the Devil *Steen*.

The aldermen did exactly as James van Artevelde demanded.

John van Steenbeke and his co-conspirators were judged by the aldermen of the Law and found guilty of slander. The enquiry into the accounts proved nothing irregular had been paid or not been paid to James van Artevelde.

Ser John van Steenbeke was banished from Ghent for a period of fifty years. His friends also were exiled, their properties confiscated and sold to the benefit of the city of Ghent.

James van Artevelde thanked the militia of the three cities in the *Bijloke* field and asked the men to return to their homes. His power was more firmly established than ever. Still, the worm had entered the apple. It had been demonstrated it was possible to contest James’s power and the aldermen clearly stood higher in the hierarchy than he.

Chapter 5. The uneasy Truce of Malestroit and the Fulfilment. Spring 1343 - Summer 1345

The Strives during the Truce

During the times of the Truce of Malestroit, James van Artevelde did not replace the role of the aldermen of Ghent and the authority of the count, but he continued to be the undisputed centre of power in Ghent and Flanders. Since the Pharaïldis men had abandoned him, he felt he would be alone with his claim to absolute power. He couldn't even like that alternative of absolute power himself. He racked his mind for another solution. An uneasy peace set in for Flanders, but commerce and production boomed. Nevertheless, James's greatest worries in the following years of 1343 and 1344 were with the growing strives between the guilds inside the cities, and also with the contestation by the smaller towns of the suffocating dominance of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper.

As the count had abandoned the county, van Artevelde and his supporters were once more deprived of the ultimate, moral authority and instrument that could be used to legitimise their rulings. They did not seem to need that authority anymore! On that point, van Artevelde had been right.

The antagonisms between the three cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper and the lesser cities gave rise to limited uprisings, but these were easily suppressed.

The larger source of unrest now originated from the strives between the guilds. As wealth increased in Flanders to unprecedented heights, tensions rose, for not everybody shared to the same degree in the wealth. The weavers and traders prospered, and the lesser guilds profited from that wealth, though not to the same extent. The fullers worked for the weavers, but they did not see their salaries increase and thus the major part of the working population of Ghent continued to live in misery. Ghent became a city of tensions within its society, and some men were bound to use these tensions for their own ambitions and designs.

Count Louis resided in France, but he continued to use any opposition to James van Artevelde and to the cities' rule, as best and as methodically as he could. The smaller towns wanted a larger piece of the great wealth that came from cloth-production. They were systematically and rudely pursued by the three large cities who remained jealous of their monopoly. The count supported the claims of the lesser cities. Limited revolts in Aardenburg, for instance, were rapidly brought to a halt by the vigilance of James van Artevelde. Also the captains of Ghent, William van Vaernewijc, Gelnoot van Lens, Peter van Coudenhove and Joseph Aper remained the loyal friends and colleagues of James. Together, they wielded considerable power. The deans, Gerard Denijs for the weavers, John de Bake for the fullers and Peter Zoetaert for the lesser guilds, helped James van Artevelde to keep the rule of the large cities in power.

In February of 1343, a violent discussion broke out between Ieper and Poperinge. Poperinge appealed to the count, and Count Louis of course relished this appeal to his authority, above the authority of the large cities and of James van Artevelde. During the months of March and April, harmony between the cities was restored. Poperinge yielded. It was once more demonstrated how ruthless the large cities acted and how powerless the count remained in conflicts within his county. Louis of Nevers still had the authority of his birth, but no power.

The judgement over Poperinge was severe. The town was not allowed to produce quality cloth, striped cloth, except for its own, domestic use.

Troubles broke out in that same month of February between Bruges and the villages of the castellanies around the city, in the *Brugse Vrije*, as always over the retail sale of cloth in the *Vrije*.

Ghent was still in deficit, so John de Coster was once more sent to England in July of 1343. He visited the king with envoys of Bruges and Ieper. Other delegations followed in August of 1343 and in September. King Edward bestowed the archdeaconry of East Riding in Yorkshire to John de Coster, thanking Catherine's brother for his services to the crown. Edward paid some sums to Ghent, but the aldermen of the town had to borrow money to bring their accounts in balance.

New troubles threatened in Oudenaarde in the autumn of 1343. They were prevented to burst to violence by the delegates and troops of the three large cities. Garrisons of Ghent were left inside the town to guarantee the submission of Oudenaarde. The unrest in Oudenaarde continued however until April of 1344.

Although the truce had been signed with France, grain was still hard to come by in Ghent. The problem grew worse in 1343 by failing crops. James van Artevelde ordered scouting troops in December of 1343 to search for grain supplies stored in the castellanies of the countryside around Ghent. The magistrates stored sacks of grain even in the belfry to safeguard it. They baked bread and distributed it to the people. The scarcity of grain and the accompanying high prices were felt particularly hard by the fullers whose income had not grown.

By the Truce of Malestroit, Count William II of Hainault had abandoned his claims on the Cambrésis, Crevecoeur and Arleux to King Philip of France. In 1343, Count William of Hainault remained as adventurous as before. Free to do as he liked because the war with France was ended, at peace with his neighbours, he wished to help the Christians of Algeciras who were under siege by Muslim forces. He abandoned that project when he had to deny a rumour he would claim the title of emperor of Germany. He was called in as arbiter of conflicts between the duke of Brabant and the bishop of Liège, who disputed on any subject they could think of. William was married to Joanna, daughter of the duke of Brabant, so he judged in favour of Brabant. The same day, however, he travelled to Venice, embarked on a ship there and sailed to the Holy Land. He travelled on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and returned only at the end of the year, in November. A month later, he set out for Prussia to ride to the aid of the Teutonic Knights who fought the pagan Lithuanians. He only returned in April of 1344, having been absent from his affairs in Hainault, Holland and Zeeland for almost an entire year. He had to fight the Frisians then, who revolted against him. In September of 1345, his troops were ambushed near Stavoren. The Frisians killed all the men-at-arms of Hainault, including the count. He had no children, so the House of Avesnes ended with him.

In October of 1343 also died Reginald of Guelders, King Edward's brother-in-law and faithful ally of the king. The eldest son of Reginald was still young, so disputes began about who would succeed on Reginald and over the guardianship of his son and heir. These disputes ended only in the summer of 1344.

In November, the aldermen of Bruges called Ghent to help to suppress an uprising of the guilds in Bruges. The troops of Ghent marched into the streets of Bruges, a clear sign of the

supremacy of the Gentenaars in the alliance of the three cities. This dominance and presence of Ghent, the expeditions to other towns in Flanders, cost the city much in money.

In the spring of 1344, the disputes between Ieper and Poperinge ran high once more. And again the disputes were about the prohibition of producing certain types of cloth. Although aldermen of Ghent and captains and troops were sent to the region, violent skirmishes were fought. The militia of Ieper attacked Poperinge, killing a number of citizens. The skirmishes evolved to outright battles, so that over one hundred men of Poperinge got killed. Ieper also suffered serious losses. Once more, Poperinge was forced to yield. William van Vaernewijc led troops of militiamen of Ghent to restore the peace by force. Poperinge was heavily fined. More commotions in Diksmuide had to be settled in the autumn of 1344.

The aldermen and receivers of Ghent were changed, as every year, in August. The eight electors chose not only partisans of James van Artevelde, but also men who had been his opponents. Peter Stocman, the weaver who had been aldermen in the year of the van Steenbeke attack on James, was appointed as receiver. Was that a sign the electors and other influential men had wanted other control on the accounts of Ghent? Another weaver, Lievin van Veurne, who had been an ally of John van Steenbeke, and who had been replaced because of this as alderman in mid-1342, also became a receiver of the city. James van Artevelde felt his authority was not as absolute as before. Other forces slowly emerged.

On the sixteenth of January 1345, King Edward III made provisions with his Exchequer to give an annual allowance of one hundred pounds to James van Artevelde. The king granted this amount for the good services James had provided abroad to the crown of England. Had James van Artevelde already asked for this money in preparation of a possible escape to England? Had he listened anyhow to the advice of his friends?

That same month, Dendermonde protested against the claims of Ghent on the control of the production of striped cloth. Dendermonde had infringed on the privileges of Ghent. Delegates were sent with troops from Ghent. The aldermen gave in, but the people of the town begged Count Louis for protection against Ghent.

In the spring of 1345, advances were made by Count Louis to prepare his return to Flanders. The count requested a conference at Menen with the cities, but Ghent, Bruges and Ieper demanded that the count should recognise Edward as the king of France, which Count Louis refused. He remained loyal to France. Count Louis had by then been absent from Flanders for more than two years. Flanders had got used to living without the authority of the count. Their point of reference still remained James van Artevelde! Count Louis nevertheless eagerly desired to regain power over his county. He began again to intrigue with the lords of the castellanies of Flanders who had been banished from Flanders and who had lost their properties, as well as with the *Leliaerts* of the county.

Meanwhile, James van Artevelde and the aldermen of the large towns kept a strong hand on their policy of dominating the smaller towns in their region. They intervened in the designation of aldermen in Kortrijk and Aardenburg. They interposed themselves in Aalst and Geraardsbergen, and also at Oudenaarde. More difficulties rose at Waasmunster, Hulst and Assenede.

Poperinge revolted against Ieper for the so-manieth time. Poperinge had already declared in September of the previous year they would no longer recognise the dominance of Ieper. They chose a leader, James Beyts, ran to arms, and were determined to defend their crafts. Ieper

arrived at Poperinge with a strong contingent of militiamen. The men of Poperinge sallied under the command of a knight, Ser John of Hautekerke, but they were defeated in battle, and a large number of men of Poperinge were killed. The militiamen of Ieper then destroyed the looms in the region, including in small towns and villages such Bailleul, Reninghelst and Langemark. The cloth manufacture was thus suppressed in the entire region of Poperinge by the men of Ieper.

Aalst too revolted, and here a larger force was needed to contain the revolt. The border of Brabant had to be reinforced, for *Leliaerts* might attack from out of that county. The *Leliaerts* were in power in that town. Begin May, other troops of the coalition of the three cities marched against the *Leliaerts* of Aalst.

It became clear to James van Artevelde, that the influence of the count was felt in these uprisings. Count Louis had also sent numerous letters in the last months to the towns of Flanders, exhorting them to renounce the support to King Edward of England. The duke of Brabant had called representatives of the cities to Brussels to the same effect, to discuss the support of the cities to King Edward. The smaller cities estimated they had a chance of imposing their own rules with the help of Count Louis, and Louis played these cards against Ghent, Bruges and Ieper, but most of all against Ghent, where James van Artevelde ruled. The Count thus consistently and regularly challenged the regime of James van Artevelde and of the aldermen of the three main cities, using the smaller cities and the countryside to his aims. James van Artevelde was frustrated. He was tired of the constant pressure and too much a rational *Gentenaar* not to want to end that situation in a drastic move. The people around him, however, were still not ripe for such a change.

Count Louis of Nevers was more than eager to return to Flanders, pressed to do so by King Philip of Valois. King Philip wanted to close Flanders for King Edward. On the twenty-eighth of March, Louis summoned the Flemish delegates to negotiate his peaceful return.

The three large cities were much impressed by the count's pressure on the lords of the countryside and on the smaller towns. They sought peace and rest. The aldermen of the cities discussed to agree with Louis's return to Flanders in peace.

James van Artevelde was very much disappointed by the attitude of the aldermen of the three cities. It seemed to him the aldermen were admitting guilt and abandoned the fight before it was fought. He recognised more than before how futile his efforts had been of trying to install an alternative authority in Flanders. He thought he could keep and exercise his power in Flanders, maybe even for a long time, but he would never be able to gain the authority to rule over the county. He felt depressed and abandoned. He gave more thought to the advice of his friends Gillis Vresele and Raes van Lake.

James spoke at length with Gelnoot van Lens, the warrior, who also had become tired with the incessant efforts to guarantee the rule of the cities over that of the count, realising how vain those efforts now seemed. They spoke to Peter van Coudenhove.

The three men could not change the decisions of the aldermen, and they knew that when the count returned and sermoned the aldermen, they would be sacrificed. They agreed together to resign as captains of Ghent. They offered their resignation during a meeting of the aldermen, making clear how much they resented the attitude of the magistrates. They told they respected the forms of government of the city. They showed in a long speech the perfidy of the count, who preferred to sow discord and revolt in Flanders rather than serve the interests of his county. The aldermen were surprised, listened attentively to the arguments the captains developed, but they accepted the resignation.

James van Artevelde was no longer the head captain of Ghent, no longer the *Beleeder der Stede*, no longer the manager and military commander of Ghent!

James van Artevelde felt his resignation as a terrible defeat. He remained gloomy of mind, and extremely bitter at first. Nevertheless, his mind had found tranquillity, a state of detachment and of inner harmony as he thought he had forever lost since he had begun to fight for Ghent. He turned back to his trade and worked furiously at arranging new contracts and conclude ventures.

A strange, unexpected development then began.

At the end of April, the three cities notified Count Louis they refused his return to the county. They felt the current form of government satisfied their people. In Ghent, a part of the wealthier weavers were disappointed. It was one conflict more in the town.

Although James van Artevelde was no captain anymore, everybody, aldermen and deans, continued considering him the wise man of Ghent. So did the rest of Flanders! James van Artevelde seemed to have given up his power, and by that fact have gained in authority! All turned toward him for advice and decisions. He was invited to special meetings of the aldermen, and continued discussing options with them. Aldermen arrived at all hours in his house of the *Kalanderberg* to talk about projects and accounts. Also James's wife, Catherine de Coster, was treated with much deference.

A little later, Gillis van Gavere was chosen by the aldermen as head captain to replace James, and John de Scouteete replaced Gelnoot van Lens. John van Meesine was chosen for Peter van Coudenhove. At the same time, Peter Zoetaard, a furrier but a good and loyal friend of James van Artevelde, was deposed as overdean of the small guilds and replaced by Simon Parijs, who was an outspoken opponent of James van Artevelde. James wondered whether he would receive the time to blend in with the shadows of the town, or whether his opponents, the wolf pack, would home in on him and try to physically eliminate him before he could become a normal citizen again.

In April of 1345, Duke John of Brabant sought a reconciliation with King Philip of France and with Count Louis of Flanders. The marriage between the son of Count Louis of Nevers, equally called Louis, and the daughter of Duke John, Margaret, was arranged.

Count Louis was therefore in Brabant at the end of April, and from out of Brussels he authorised Dendermonde to take all necessary steps to protect the city against further attempts of Ghent to force the production of quality cloth out of the town. *Leliaerts* and craftsmen now found a common cause. The count allowed the people of Dendermonde to tear down dykes, to inundate regions for their defence, and to build new fortresses. Early May, Count Louis signed charters in which he assured Dendermonde of his aid with troops. Count Louis felt stronger in power also because the duke of Brabant had promised him men-at-arms and funds. Count Louis in his turn, renounced to all rights he might still have held on the town of Mechelen. The aldermen of Dendermonde promised allegiance to the count, rejecting the dominance of Ghent. Ghent and the other two large cities would have to send a strong force to subdue Dendermonde, for in early May more of the count's men entered Dendermonde. Begin May, troops of the three cities were sent to Dendermonde.

The finances of Ghent were in a dire situation because of the expenses due to the interventions and activities of the aldermen, captains and envoys of the city. It was decided to loan money, enormous amounts, from the *Ruwaard* Simon van Halen-Mirabello, from the Lord of Nevele, and especially from the large abbeys in the town. Saint Peter's, Saint Baafs, the *Baudeloo* Abbey, the *Bijloke* Convent, loaned money to the town, as did many other.

In the month of April, the cities of Flanders asked the cities of Hainault and Brabant to renew their vows to the charter of alliance, but no answer arrived. The cities of Hainault and Brabant had passed into the influence of their count and duke, and stood once more under the incessant pressure of King Philip of France. James van Artevelde and the Pharaïldis men, who had reconciled with him, understood that the gap between on the one hand Flanders and on the other the count and King Philip, had narrowed. The power of the large cities was falling apart by the lack of a decisive leader in the cities. The large cities were forced to defend their interests on many fronts, at great cost, pressed to do so by the initiatives of the princes. What would the new rule look like? How soon would it be enforced?

King Edward III appointed in that month the earl of Northampton as his captain for Brittany. The earl of Derby was ordered to lead a campaign in Gascony. The king had abandoned his policy of granting huge sums of money to his allies in the Low Countries. He directed his efforts and funds, which had been streaming in during the previous year, to raise an army for a new campaign in France. He had every intention in that spring to launch a new campaign in France. In June, the king assembled troops to embark on his fleet for an expedition to Brittany or Normandy. In June also, he promised Geoffrey d'Harcourt he would give back to him his ancestral domains in Normandy once he had reconquered them. Edward III nourished the project to disembark in Normandy. Nevertheless, he paid also his most urgent debts in the Low Countries. On the eleventh of June, King Edward III agreed to pay the costs spent for the war by James van Artevelde and William van Vaerneuijck. They were to share the huge sum of a thousand pounds grossi, transferred to them from the books of merchants of Lucca in Italy.

Edward also sent Philip of Weston and John Stury to consolidate his alliances with Emperor Lewis the Bavarian and with the princes of the Low Countries. His star had been dimming in the Low Countries and Philip of Valois tried much to draw Brabant and Hainault back into the sphere of his influence. On Philip of Valois' insistence, Count Louis de Nevers multiplied his efforts to win back Flanders under his power.

Bad Monday

The finances of the city of Ghent remained in a dire state. The city had not only to borrow heavily, taxes had to be upgraded. The wealth of individual citizens, of the traders and the weavers and of the men of the small guilds had grown substantially, but the fullers, who were paid for their work by the weavers at salaries determined by the aldermen, had not at all shared in the benefits of the peace and freedom of commerce guaranteed by the Truce of Malestroit. The fullers therefore demanded to be paid more, four grossi more, for their fulling work.

The demand was brought to the aldermen on the second of May of 1345 during a meeting of the aldermen of Ghent, a meeting at which also the deans and the captains of Ghent had been

invited in council, by the dean of the fullers, John de Bake. The deans were present at the meeting, but of the captains only William van Vaerneuijck attended.

John de Bake was a very reasonable man, and a great supporter of James van Artevelde's regime. He had become dean of the fullers in August of 1341, and had served and managed the guild wisely ever since.

The dean of the weavers, Gerard Denijs, categorically refused the higher wages. He argued the rising cost of woven materials would cause diminishing sales of cloth, diminishing return on taxes for the city, and loss of income for the weavers and the members of the small guilds.

Gerard Denijs had become dean of the weavers in April of 1343, following up on Peter Mabenzone. He too had been in function uninterruptedly since that time. He was a hot-headed man, sly and cunning but short-tempered. He wanted to have the highest word in every altercation of words. He didn't suffer coming out of an argument as the underdog, cried everybody down, and was therefore much admired by the more easily impressionable of the weavers. He was a vain man, and his vanity demanded continuous gratification. His cunning was malignant. He was slyer than smart, a man who tolerated nobody above him. He was extremely ambitious, not really because he had total confidence in his convictions and values, but simply because he always wanted to be the man at the top.

Gerard Denijs had been banned from Ghent in 1326 after a revolt of the weavers against the landowner-*poorters* and knights-aldermen, having been afraid of nobody and having acted on impulse. He was only allowed back in Ghent by special agreement of James van Artevelde in 1338, the year James had come to power, for James had wanted the guilds of the weavers and the fullers to be reconciled with the landowners and the aldermen. Gerard Denijs had then even become an alderman in 1340, but he was still considered more of a nuisance than as an asset among the aldermen. He criticised everybody and everything, knew always best what should have been done - afterwards. From 1343 on he had gained more influence, not in the least because he seemed more inclined toward the count, although he remained devoted to the cause of Ghent. He too had been sent on missions for Ghent. In August of 1344, he was one of the four men of the city magistrates designated to renew the aldermen for the next year, the other four men being designated by the count.

Gerard Denijs remembered well the times when the town aldermen had governed with the deans of the fullers and the deans of the small guilds, excluding the dean of the weavers. He was very determined not to allow those times to return. James van Artevelde had ended Denijs' exile from Ghent. He had brought the dean of the weavers to prominence and as the equal of the other deans, hoping Denijs would support the new regime and its values, to which the man had indeed proved loyal. Denijs considered James's grace nothing more than the absolute due of the weavers' guild, and rather as a weakness of James van Artevelde who had in Denijs' view dearly needed the advocacy of the powerful weavers. What the weavers had given to van Artevelde, the support of his regime, they could also at any time reclaim, Denijs regularly reminded the captains.

When John de Bake formulated his demand of higher salaries for the fullers, Gerard Denijs shot up from his bench and cried, 'denied, denied!' almost instantly, without reflection. He was opposed to anything new he had not proposed himself, and if he could spite the fullers, who had for so long ruled without the weavers, all the better.

'The demand of the fullers is completely justified,' John de Bake objected. 'The sale prices of cloth have risen constantly. We remark the wealth of the weavers and of the traders, of the *lakensniders*! Most of the fullers are living in misery. The modest augmentation in salaries

can easily be coped with by the weavers, and it would help the fullers to a somewhat more decent life. With the fullers having some more money in their pockets, they would work more and harder, be grateful, and buy more cloth too, which would allow the weavers to sell more of their produce within the walls of the city. The increase in salary should boost the wealth in our town instead of diminishing it! One last matter. The fullers feel justice should be done to their contribution, as justice is done to the work of other craftsmen. The craftsmen gathered in the small guilds can increase their prices at will, as long as a buyer can be found. That is not the case for the fullers. The fullers are the only craftsmen the salaries of whom are determined by the aldermen.'

'It is not the case for the fullers,' Gerard Denijs shouted, 'because if prices for fulling had not been fixed, prices would have been much lower yet! Any poor fellow can full, whereas it takes considerable skill to weave and to trade. Money is needed beforehand too, money for looms and for buying materials that are sold sometimes months later. That is why prices of fulling are what they are, and the weavers have shown more than mercy in keeping the current prices at their extraordinary high level. We keep the prices high as a measure of charity. The weavers shall not tolerate higher salaries! Denied, I say! Denied, denied!'

'Gerard, be reasonable' Maes van Vaernewijc intervened, 'there is some truth in the arguments of John de Bake. The fullers are grumbling and have been protesting against their low salaries for months, if not years. The weavers have prospered and have been able to build reserves. Should it not be our duty to ensure the peace in our town, as well as the well-being of all our citizens? Do you prefer to walk the streets and find the corpses of the poor who have killed themselves for sheer misery lie along the houses or float in the Leie? I remember those times! Do you prefer seeing beggars at every corner, elderly fullers unable to work and unable to live from their reserves? I say we allow the fullers what they ask!'

'The fullers form the craft with the most numerous workers,' William van Vaernewijc calmly stated. 'They have been fine citizen, exemplary craftsmen. They have provided Ghent with the largest number of militiamen when the town needed to send out troops. The fullers merit some reward for their dedication to the safety, the honour and the well-being of the city. I say: the demand of the fullers is justified!'

'You are both weaklings,' Gerard Denijs shouted to the van Vaernewijc brothers. 'You would give anything to anyone who came forward with demands! Why don't you pay the fullers from your own richness, from the money you receive from England? The town's finances have been wrecked by what we paid to the militiamen, to the fullers. Militiamen should not at all be paid for their services! I remind you of who pours most money into the treasury of Ghent! Not the fullers! Taxes are levied on the production of goods, mainly of cloth, and on trade. No special taxes exist on the work of the fullers!'

'The fullers buy goods, and taxes are on the cost of all goods,' Maes van Vaernewijc continued the argument. 'We all know the cost of elementary goods such as grain, peat, wood, fullers' clay, utensils, have all risen in the last months. The weavers and the traders and the crafts of the small guilds have included these increases in the price of cloth and goods sold. The fullers have not been able to do something similar.'

'The fullers merely ask what is just,' John de Bake added, arms wide open. 'Honourable aldermen of Ghent, the fullers have arrived at the point of despair. We are no longer going to work at the current prices, for we are starving and getting poorer by the day. We work in miserable conditions. We want higher wages because we need them to pay the growing cost of clay, water and wood for our fires. We have become so desperate we are ready to take higher wages if the weavers cannot grant our wish.'

‘What do you mean by ready to take more money?’ Gerard Denijs asked. ‘Is that a threat? If we don’t give you our cloth to full anymore, full it ourselves, you shall be out of work, you fullers!’

John de Bake laughed, ‘you a fuller, Gerard Denijs? I would like to see the proud weavers dirty their hands in fullers’ clay! Why, you wouldn’t even know where to get fullers’ clay from, nor which clay to use on which kind of cloth! I remind you that fullers’ work must be done by men of the fullers’ guild! That is our Law!’

Simon Parijs, now the new overdean of the small guilds, added his word, ‘the smaller guilds support the weavers! The production of cloth in our town must not diminish, and prices must remain as they are. Ghent is in too dire a financial state to be able to allow changes at this moment. I say, like the weavers, demand refused!’

Simon Parijs nodded to Gerard Denijs, who acknowledged the support of the small guilds with a short smile of gratitude.

The fullers were isolated in the aldermen’s council. The bitterness of John de Bake grew with every second that passed. John de Bake sat down gloomily, brooding revenge for the humiliation inflicted, sulking in silence for the rest of the council.

The dispute continued for a while. No further serious arguments were added to the debate. The weavers and the cloth traders among the aldermen refused the salary increase, for they calculated how much of their profit they would have to hand over to the fullers. The aldermen from the small crafts were also opposed to the increase, for they feared their journeymen and apprentices would come for higher prices next. They too did not want to have the prices of cloth be rising and the wealth of the weavers be diminishing.

John de Bake tried another way.

‘Look out of the windows, honourable magistrates of Ghent! Hundreds of fullers stand in the streets begging for justice. They have high hopes the aldermen of their town will be reasonable men! Deceive them, disappoint them, and they will cling together to take what is theirs rightfully. Would you risk a revolt in Ghent over a moderate increase in salary?’

‘The fullers cannot demand by violence from the aldermen what is theirs to give in peace!’

William van Vaernewijc retorted, ‘but I beg the aldermen to show leniency and mercy. Too many men in Ghent, too many families suffer. It is our Christian duty to help the poor!’

‘No, no, no, demand denied!’ Gerard Denijs croaked.

The aldermen who were weavers or connected to that guild, as well as many landowner-*poorters* who were also traders in cloth, yet afraid of the populace, refused.

The aldermen voted to not allow the fullers more money for their work.

John de Bake was extremely disappointed, and also quite angry against Gerard Denijs. He hated the intransigence, pitilessness of the dean of the weavers.

All arguments exposed, John cried, bitterness in his voice, ‘you shall regret this decision, aldermen! When this judgment is made public, the blood of many *Gentenaars* will be on your heads!’

‘What is this?’ Gerard Denijs screamed, ‘what is this? Is this a threat? To arms, friends, to arms! We must defend Ghent from being ruled by threats! Call our friends to arms! Gather on the Friday Market! Banners and weapons! Banners and weapons!’

Denijs ran out of the aldermen’s house, out of the *Schepenhuis*.

He continued crying, ‘to arms, to arms,’ in the adjoining streets.

John de Bake then also ran out, to the crowd of fullers waiting for him outside.

He shouted, 'the weavers and the small crafts refuse the small increase of salaries! They are calling their guilds to arms! Friends, I too call you to arms! To arms! To the Friday Market in arms! Defend your interests! Show the weavers who have fought for our town! To arms!'

James van Artevelde had been walking as if by chance near the *Schepenhuis* at that moment. He saw the aldermen run out of their hall in great excitement. He wondered what was going on, not angry with the commotion that had been stirred up in his absence. Yes, without his authority, matters had run quickly out of hand! He saw Maes and William van Vaernewijc look down upon him from an open window of the *steen*. They beckoned James to enter the hall. James went in and came to stand at the open window between Maes and William. James asked what had happened, and Maes told him in a few words of the dispute, which would probably be settled by an armed clash between the fullers on the one side and the weavers and the small guilds on the other. He told all the guilds would gather in the Friday Market.

'Not both the major guilds together in one place?' James exclaimed, surprised.

'Oh yes,' William van Vaernewijc told.

'That can only lead to a battle,' James said, astonished. 'Where are the troops summoned to stop such madness?'

'We should have asked for your presence in the meeting,' Maes van Vaernewijc regretted.

'Gerard Denijs and John de Bake are at one another's throat. Simon Parijs is not the man to put water on the oil. They shall fight, now, until either Denijs or de Bake lies dead in the gutter! The soul of each of them will rise to heaven accompanied by hundreds of their guildsmen!'

James van Artevelde was appalled. He said nothing but he looked reproachfully at the van Vaernewijc brothers.

James van Artevelde and the van Vaernewijcs stood in silence at the window of the aldermen's hall. They saw all the people run away, back into the side streets, probably to fetch weapons and banners, shields and mail coats.

Maes asked, 'what now? How can we stop this madness?'

William van Vaernewijc, the captain, looked very pale. He hesitated a long time to answer to his brother. He hoped James van Artevelde would come up with a solution, but James also looked at William.

William said, 'I blame myself very much, Maes and James! I should have foreseen this development and blocked the streets, formed an escort of guards and keep John de Bake and Gerard Denijs isolated. They should not have been allowed to call their guildsmen to arms! I have not seen this outburst coming! Was I blinded? I have been a fool! I could better predict what would happen in Poperinge or in Dendermonde than in our own town. I did talk to Gillis van Gavere and to de Scouteete, and to the other captains, but they hushed me. They have more than five hundred men waiting at various points of Ghent, but if the deans call to arms, I wonder what those men, all militiamen, all members of guilds, will do. I guess they may well run away from their new captains and obey to the commands of their deans! No more than a few tens of guards may be left, and with so few guards, what can we accomplish? The angry guilds will not be kept separate! I'm afraid, less a miracle happens, there is a very great chance we will have bloodshed today. What a hard-headed fool have we with Denijs! That man is a scourge!'

'A fool he is,' Maes van Vaernewijc agreed, 'but he is a very powerful and very dangerous fool. He is out for power in Ghent! He preaches the basest feelings in his guildsmen. He has a very big mouth and a vile character, so the guildsmen will follow him gladly, especially the

low-witted ones. He can be very charming with the weavers' ladies and with their children. He pretends to have only the interests of the weavers in mind, but he is afraid of nothing, so the weavers push him to the forefront, though he pursues only his own interests. He is the leading dog of the pack, the dog that barks hardest. John de Bake too is a very impulsive man. He should have let this occasion pass, proffer no threats, and continue working with us in secret, in the shadows, to force Denijs one way or other to accept. Have you remarked how quickly Denijs jumped on the threat? He was waiting for John de Bake to call a threat! He wants a fight! The weavers are smarter, better armed, better trained and better organised than the fullers. The fullers outnumber the weavers, but they will have it harder to assemble their men. Many fullers will not dare to oppose the weavers, fearing they might lose work to the men they fight. Gerard Denijs knows all that. He may indeed win today, but at the cost of much bloodshed. After a fight, he may become the most powerful man of Ghent who can dictate his will to us, captains. He will have counted wrongly, I can tell you as much! I will not allow him!

'This comes at the worst possible moment,' James van Artevelde deplored. 'We have terrible issues in Poperinge. Dendermonde has revolted from us and runs into the arms of the count. *Leliaerts* threaten Aalst. Count Louis has started once more one of his malicious series of intrigues to divide Flanders and to excite the smaller towns against us. We must intervene in force and with authority against those hearths of revolt and yet, at the same time, we have to face a revolt in our own town, which will destroy our moral authority! If the weavers and the fullers clash, the rift between the two guilds will open further, and one party may appeal to the count for support. The count might try to enter Ghent at the head of troops, to be helped by the defeated party.'

James thought, 'my authority too will be doomed. The current aldermen will be weakened in reputation and influence. This struggle can turn into a major, final disaster for our cause and for me in particular.'

'The only thing we can do, then, is to intervene,' Maes van Vaernewijc concluded. 'We must separate the guildsmen with as many guards as we can get. There must be a way to interpose reason! William, try to assemble trumpeters and drummers. Go to the Friday Market with closed ranks of guardsmen, as many as you can find, and make lots of noise! I'll open the cellars of the aldermen's hall for you. Take as many banners of Ghent as you can hold. Maybe the view of the banners will keep the guilds separated!'

'I'll do that, thank you, Maes,' William said, and then he ran out of the aldermen's hall to find his colleagues, the captains of Ghent.

James van Artevelde took leave of Maes van Vaernewijc and he too wanted to walk to the *Bijloke* field where most of the guards of the captains would probably assemble. This field was a military ground of the city. While he walked, he saw how many men emerged from their houses, clad in mail hauberks and armed with swords and *goedendags* and axes, some wearing shields. The men ran to the Friday Market, the centre of Ghent.

Fears gripped James's mind, for he realised a major battle inside the walls of the city might be in the making. He then reflected on what he should and could do. The aim was to separate the guilds. He doubted the new captains could assemble enough men. Not if they had not foreseen the fight, which they clearly hadn't. What if the separation did not succeed? What if the guards arrived too late? They would not be able to stop the massacre! The bloodshed had to be violent but short, then. He should take sides! Support the weakest side was out of the question. It was no solution, for it would only make the battle last longer. He should support the strongest party. He should support the weavers.

Could he support the fullers? No, he couldn't, for he was no fuller. He was a trader and a landowner, a member of the small guilds. Supporting the weavers was a cold, counter-

intuitive choice, opportunistic, but very rational choice! Have one side be crushed rapidly, share in the triumph, then win time and bring back the peace in Ghent. Even if the weavers won, the position of the fullers could be very slowly ameliorated, the dean of the fullers brought back into the council. Yes, he should help the strongest party in the battle, and the weakest afterwards. With cold ice burning in his heart, James van Artevelde realised a victory of the weavers would mean the glory of Gerard Denijs, who would weigh from then on terribly on the decisions of the aldermen. Poor Ghent, then!

James van Artevelde walked and thought about alternatives. Denijs would be the new strong man in the city. But Denijs could lose the coming battle! No, he couldn't! Maes van Vaernewijc had been right. The weavers were so much better organised than the fullers. 'Well,' James van Artevelde thought almost aloud, 'I am still to follow the advice of my friends. I must even more step back, relent completely power. I must not be connected to the very latest developments in the city. I must remain the wise man, the man to whom all turn when Ghent seems lost. I must remain visible, but be the wisest. Ghent cannot be led by Gerard Denijs! The aldermen and the members of the distinguished families despise the man. He will not be granted all power! I will remain the arbiter, even with less or no actual military power. Was that not the advice of my friends of the Pharaïldis group? Denijs also detests the count. He will not tolerate the count to command in Ghent. He still wants revenge for his exile of twenty years ago. It comes all back to politics, then.'

James van Artevelde looked at the fine houses in his street while he walked to the *Bijloke*. 'Why should I go to the *Bijloke*?' he asked himself. 'My reaction to go there was instinctive, but I have nothing to do there anymore! Gillis van Gavere, the head captain and John de Scouteete and John van Meesine are not exactly friends of mine. They will send me away and assume command, as they should. They are not going to hand over command to me! They will also not listen to my advice, not those three. They are more bound to ignore me haughtily than to listen to my arguments and advice. No, I'd better go home, put a mail on my body and a sword at my side, and return to the Friday Market to watch how matters evolve there. If there is a fight, I may wield a few strokes and make sure to hurt no one, but be present.'

He entered his house and did as he had decided. A few moments later, he too walked back to the Friday Market. He wondered on which side his friends would fight if they had to. Raes van Lake and his sons would support the weavers, and so would the de Smets father and son and the de Herts father and son. Also Gillis Vresele would rather stand among the weavers and small guilds. James should seek out his friends on the Friday Market. Then, suddenly, he thought about John and Pieter Denout, and his blood thickened. The Denouts would fight on the side of the fullers! Would he, James, have to cross swords with John and Pieter?

James van Artevelde walked on very slowly. He saluted the men that ran before him and who recognised him. Yes, many more weavers and people from the small guilds ran here than fullers! How many guards the captains had been able to bring together. Would William van Vaernewijc find the other captains? William was extremely courageous. How courageous were the other captains? The captains were chosen, the choice of a captain was a political fact. In order not to make enemies among the aldermen, the captains might make an appearance when it was too late.

The guildsmen had gathered in the Friday Market.

The fullers stood with flying banners, drums rolling ominous rhythms, at the northern side, towards the *Zuivelsteeg* and the bridge that led to *Oudburg* and to the *Gravensteen*. So many men had assembled that young fullers stood on the bridge.

The weavers and the smaller guilds had gathered around the Church of Saint James, to the south. They occupied the *Veemarkt*, the Cattle Market behind Saint James, and the streets leading to the Friday Market, mainly the *Kammerstraat*. The weavers had come with trumpeters and pipers.

The two yelling hordes of armed guildsmen formed ranks not five feet from each other in two dense groups, facing each other.

In the first ranks of the weavers stood Gerard Denijs, in a mail hauberk, sword and small shield in hands, a bascinet deep on his head.

John de Bake, in leather jerkin and a small steel breastplate, a larger and heavier helmet covering most of his face, held a *goedendag* in his right fist.

The two men shouted insults at each other.

‘Miserable fool, stupid journey man, bloodsucker of a fuller, yield! We are more numerous! Yield, recognise your errors!’ Gerard Denijs shouted.

‘Ignoble extortioner, despicable traitor, your mother’s shame! We do not have to yield! You suck our blood, you want us miserable, you want us starving and dying. This is our town!’

John de Bake retorted. ‘Go away from here! The Friday Market is ours!’

The men around them hit their swords and *goedendags* on their shields and breastplates. The drums and trumpets added to the terrible din in the large square. De Bake and Denijs looked at each other’s eyes filled with hatred and loathing. They shouted their guilds’ war cries and looked for support to the friends standing next to them.

Nobody will know who first jumped forward to deal a blow to the other party, a fuller or a weaver, Gerard Denijs or John de Bake or somebody else, but in a moment’s time the two groups clashed. No town guards, no captains represented the authority of the aldermen to separate the two groups of guildsmen. William van Vaernewijc had either failed to find enough guards, or been hampered to intervene by the captain-in-chief.

The weavers and the fullers fused into one fighting mass of slashing, slamming, hitting and thrusting furious men. They threw their shields in each other’s faces. *Goedendags* and spears pierced flesh. Swords swung. The first wounded fell in a nick of time in a massed throng of soft bodies. The men were crushed together by the rear ranks, and though there was little place, the first dead fell. Denijs nor de Bake could still have wielded a weapon, but the pikes of the *goedendags* came from nowhere and everywhere. They were handier weapons in such massed fight in the market than swords and axes. Swords had to slash, but there was no space to slash. *Goedendags* flew forward and reached flesh, piercing mails. The weapons were all used as lances in this close mêlée of sweating, pushing bodies. The *goedendags* pierced flesh of bellies and of legs. Axes were flung from behind, cleaving skulls. Halberds hooked at legs and cut. After a very short while of the first clash, many corpses fell to the ground, profusely bleeding from the most horrible wounds. This enraged the fighters. The most dead in the shortest possible time fell here, in the front ranks. A little more space was left. The fight developed then all over the Friday Market, as fullers and weavers and smiths and butchers tried to mingle more. The din of the battle was terrible. The struggle for supremacy, waged between brothers, raged pitilessly. From the heights of Sint James’s church, he devils laughed and feasted.

Gerard Denijs swung his sword from behind the shield with which he had deflected a thrust of a *goedendag*. He sliced through the left arm of his opponent, a stocky fuller he had seen often in Ghent loitering along the quays. The man shrunk from the sudden pain where his mails had been opened and from which now blood gusted. Denijs grabbed the moment of hesitation to bring his sword swiftly up again and cut at the fuller's neck. All sense of emotion had been torn from Denijs' mind. Denijs' opponent dropped his weapon, tried stepping back to avoid the fury of the weaver, but couldn't, and Denijs killed the staggering man cleanly by stabbing his gleaming red sword in the man's gullet. The fuller sank to his knees, clawing his hands to his neck. Denijs already hacked like a vengeful madman at another raging fuller.

John de Bake stood two paces from Gerard Denijs, facing his enemies. De Bake shoved his *goedendag* past the sword of a weaver. He too knew his opponent vaguely, enough to know the man was a weaver. The *goedendag* returned and pierced the belly of John's enemy. He took some time to withdraw the long point of his heavy spear, saw the man wince from pain, and swung the leaden weight behind the point at the man's skull, cracking the bone and killing the weaver instantly. The *goedendag* was de Bake's preferred weapon. He was a strong man, with powerful muscles and strong legs, and he had much exercised with his spear, so now, purely by instinct, he thrust and smashed, plunged and hit with his *goedendag*. He did not think while he killed and maimed, he too had no time for feelings of pity for the slayed.

Contrary to what James van Artevelde had feared, his friend John Denout had not left his house. An odd winter cold had surfaced and John, over sixty years old, was lying in bed with a fever. His son, Pieter Denout, fought in the Friday Market. He worked in a group of friends and colleagues at the west side of the market. A *mêlée* fought in front of him, but he could barely see what happened in the front rows. Where he stood, no weaver had yet reached deep into the fullers' ranks. In fact, the fullers had not really formed disciplined ranks behind. They stood shoulder to shoulder and had only forced other fullers forward. Pieter could hear the din of the fight in front of him, though, and he expected soon to have to use his *goedendag*. Fear gripped his loins. Would he stand before Raes van Lake and his sons? Was it not justice to ask for some more money from the rich weavers? Were a few grossi more worth fighting for?

Raes van Lake the Elder was also not on the Friday Market that day. His sons Raes the Younger and William, however, stood in the square. They also stood at the west side of the Friday Market. They would soon confront Pieter Denout, for they fought at each other's side like untamed lions. Raes the Younger was a crossbowman, but he had thought a crossbow would be of little use inside the city, so he slung a battle-axe. He had learned to wield an axe with an old warrior. He applied in the Friday Market all the tricks of battle he had learned. He was not tall. He nevertheless used his height to his advantage. He ducked, drew at the leg of an opponent fuller, made the man stagger, lose balance, and then Raes killed him with the point of his axe. He swung his weapon round to make place in front of him and to protect himself and his brother from other fullers that might thrust a spear or a sword forward. Raes's brother William protected him at his right side. William proved once more what a dreaded magician he was with sword and shield. William might not have powerful muscles, but his skill with the sword was remarkable and feared, and William could develop wildish energy in a fight so that his opponents stood astonished and frightened. William did not allow them to recede.

Raes and William had each already killed or wounded more than a few fullers. They had seen their enemies fall, blood sprouting from terrible wounds. Still they kept stepping forward over the dead bodies of fullers. They did not look to check whether the men were merely wounded or dead. When their opponents ceased to be a danger to them, they still went on, relentlessly

fighting. They forgot what happened behind them. They were such devilish warriors they had formed a wedge into the mass of the fullers, and when they advanced, the fullers stepped back, fearing to attack them. To their right and left, but slightly behind them, young weavers, friends of Raes and William, formed the sides of the wedge that inexorably threw the fullers back. Raes and William seemed so superior in battle that when they engaged a fuller, they could see the instant fear dimming the eyes of their enemy.

James van Artevelde arrived from a side street into the Friday Market. He had at first only recognised fullers around him. He had turned back and walked more away from the Leie towards the Saint James Church, and from there back to the Friday Market. He arrived in the mass of the weavers and was absorbed by them. The weavers recognised him and cheered. James wanted to calm the men, tell them they should stop fighting their friends from the same town, but the weavers shouted so loud his words were lost in the noise. They did not let him speak. They kept shouting the slogans of their guild and pushed him forward until he stood near where the fighting was worst. He found John de Hert and John de Smet there and came to their midst. He drew his sword, grinned at his companions, and the cheers of the weavers augmented in volume and intensity. Then, flanked by the two Johns, he rushed forward, a wild group of weavers behind him. Without knowing, he entered the wedge the van Lake brothers had formed. James van Artevelde stood a few sweating and bloodied men behind Raes and William van Lake.

He swung his sword against the fullers, but he only defended himself, deflecting and avoiding thrusts of goedendags and slashes of swords, crying, 'back you fullers! Stop this madness! Put your weapons down, do not fight your brothers! Have we not suffered enough together?' This was no time for reason! Nobody heard James crying, and nobody listened to what he shouted. James advanced, throwing his shield into the bodies of the raging fullers, and in a few steps he stood next to William and Raes van Lake. He recognised the brothers, William grinning at him, and then the two Johns fought also at their side.

At that moment, deep behind in the wild, shouting mass of weavers, the panels of the main door of the church of Saint James were flung open. Out of the church stepped a procession of priests. The first priest to walk straight into the weavers was a huge and strong man. He was dressed entirely in white. Expensive white lace hung around his neck on an embroidered white tunic. White lace hung at his sleeves. The white tunic with a yellow, golden cross embroidered on it, hung to lower than his knees. Rays of sunlight sprayed from the cross. The priest held a dark wooden staff with both his hands, far in front of him. On the staff stood a huge silver-gilded crucifix, probably the heaviest of the church, the one best known by the people who attended mass in Saint James. Behind him followed a priest who wore the relic-holder in which the host of Christ was preserved, and then more priests wearing incense burners followed. More priests sang psalms and clang the bells of mass. At the same time, the bells of the tower of Saint James clang ominously their long, sad tones over the city. A little later, more bells from other churches, from Ghent's Saint John's Church foremost, joined their low sounds to the lamenting of the sounds of Saint James. The group of priests tried to walk on through the weavers.

The huge priest who led the procession shouted as loud as he could, 'on your knees for your Lord! Kneel, you doomed men! Stop this senseless skilling! Kneel and go home and repent! You are killing your brothers! Stop this insane fighting! On your knees for your Lord!' A few weavers indeed knelt and made the signs of the cross, but the madness of the men was so great, so mind-blinding, that the weavers who stood with their backs to the priests pretended not to hear what the priests wanted. A few more men hid their weapons, but they did not move. The priest stepped against a wall of men who placed their shoulders together to

halt the procession. The priest wearing the crucifix could not advance anymore. He hit the backs of the rows with the heavy crucifix, but the men held their arms above their heads, and ignored what happened behind them. The priest shouted orders louder and louder, he brought his silver-gilt crucifix up and down on the backs of the wildly shouting and fighting men in front of him, but he could not go on. The priest pushed, held the cross a while with one hand and slammed his fist on the backs, but the weavers did not let him through. The procession remained where it was, and then the ranks of the weavers closed in on the priests so that the religious men were merely other figures in a dense mass of weavers.

William and Raes van Lake fought over corpses of slain fullers. They advanced implacably. They had not stepped straight on; they had deviated to the west side, and they arrived almost against the façades of the houses on the Friday Market where Pieter Denout fought. At the same time, James van Artevelde and John de Hert with John de Smet had reached the space where Denout fought, recognising him. James formed a three-man line when he recognised his friend Pieter, who defended his life against the murderous onslaught of the weavers. Pieter Denout fought bravely, but he had only a short coat of mail on for protection of his breast. He might have lost his shield, for he wore none. He was a muscular, lean man, who used his energy and dexterity with the sword to keep his opponents from passing by him. He courageously parried sword thrusts and swinging and piercing *goedendags*. Pieter had the good luck no weaver brandishing a battle-axe fought near him, until Raes van Lake arrived in his vicinity. The van Lake brothers wounded a man right in front of Pieter, and then they faced him as immediate opponents.

James van Artevelde watched with astonishment how William van Lake swung his weapon at Pieter, and then Raes arrived close with his axe. William was so battle-crazed, angry, mad, blood in his eyes, he just swung on without looking at the faces of his adversaries. James jumped to William, avoiding a *goedendag* that came to graze his legs and lower body from behind a shield, and he shoved William away, aside, with a powerful movement of his shoulders.

‘William, you have Pieter Denout in front of you! Start thinking! Grab yourself together! What are you doing? Don’t fight Pieter! Stop, William!’

William looked at James, panting, coming out of a haze. He looked bewildered, and then also recognised Pieter.

Raes van Lake had also noticed Pieter Denout by then. He lowered his axe and only defended his body from the weapons of the fullers. He too kept defending himself only now, parrying blows. He too had come to his senses.

‘We have to get out of here,’ he cried, almost weeping. ‘We are killing friends, William! What have we done? Get to the side!’

James van Artevelde looked to where Raes pointed, seeing with the other eye Pieter Denout standing, totally bewildered, watching William and Raes.

James shouted, ‘to the side! We are leaving! We have fought enough!’

James pushed William towards the façades of the stone houses of the Friday Market, towards an alley that led away from the fighting. Raes also drew Pieter and William on. Pieter tore Raes’s arm away, but then Raes held two arms around the fuller.

He shouted, ‘friend, friend! Let us through, you ugly faces!’

Raes stepped first to behind two ranks of still fighting weavers, aiming slowly for the alley. The six men, pushing and drawing, using shoulders to shove other men to the side, fought a way through battling weavers and fullers, and reached the alley from where they could escape from the market.

The butchery in the Friday Market had taken another turn!

John de Bake had been struggling against the weavers like a madman, a rock in the on-rolling mass of weavers. He stood with his sons by his side, good fighters both. Rage and fear was in de Bake's heart, for he had not expected to have to defend his life so fiercely against men with whom he had governed the same town. The weavers concentrated their rage on where John de Bake and his sons stood. John saw his son on his right fall, stabbed in the side by a sword and then killed by a vicious slice of a *goedendag*. His rage augmented, though tears welled up in his eyes, for this son had been a good boy, a good son, a hard worker and an intelligent boy, who had found a nice, gentle woman to marry to. John's hatred for the weavers slung him to a rage he had never experienced before. He wanted to die, but he would break through the lines of the perfidious weavers and take a few souls with him to heaven or hell. The heavy weight of a *goedendag* was swung against his head, and John was dazed for only a short moment, but in that instance a tip of a sword pierced through his gullet. He brought his fingers at his neck and felt the warm blood of his life seep through them, he realised he was doomed. Another sword struck through his mail and went a whole length in his belly. John de Bake fell to the ground, sure to die, only to see his second son fall over him, wounded, and being trampled upon by the triumphing weavers. The spike of a *goedendag* broke the back of his second son. John de Bake closed his eyes.

The weavers fought relentlessly on, but the defence of the fullers wavered. The fullers were being defeated! Shouts, commands launched from behind the lines made the weavers press the fullers to the Leie, to the river. The fighting was almost finished then, for the fullers tried to run away from the Friday Market over the bridge to *Oudburg* and the *Sint Veerle* Square. There was no fighting anymore, but the victorious weavers massed against the fullers, weapons no longer slaying. The fullers were inexorably pushed over the bridge or into the Leie. It seemed that the battle was over when the weavers conquered the Friday Market, the symbolic square of Ghent. Many fullers who fell in the water drowned. Others could swim or imitated the ones who could, with much swaying of arms and legs, and reached like wet dogs the opposite quay where merciful friends drew them on the dry.

William and Raes van Lake drew Pieter Denout on through the streets of Ghent. James van Artevelde drew Denout's hood far over his head. He led, so that the weavers could not see in the darkening evening who followed behind him. John de Hert and John de Smet ran with naked weapons, ready to defend the others from behind.

'We'll take Pieter to my house,' James van Artevelde whispered. 'He can stay this night in my house, and also tomorrow. I'll run on to his father's house to warn John his son is out of danger. Will the weavers now attack the fullers' homes?'

'That would be stupid to the extreme,' Raes hissed. 'What are the weavers going to do without fullers? Full the woven cloth themselves?'

'They may still attack and kill the most prominent fullers,' van Artevelde replied. 'I must try to stop them, at least in front of the Denouts' homes!'

William and Raes van Lake brought Pieter Denout to the *Kalanderberg*, to James's complex of houses. They told the servants and Catherine de Coster James wanted a room to be given to Pieter. Catherine had heard what was going on in the Friday Market, so she immediately hid Pieter in a back room, and brought him to eat. William and Raes and the two Johns returned to their fathers' houses to report and show they were still alive.

James van Artevelde ran to John Denout's house, where he told John with much shame in his eyes and a trembling voice how the weavers had killed many fullers. John sent a servant woman to his son's wife, to Kerstin de Hert. James van Artevelde remained in John Denout's

house until the middle of the night. No weaver attacked or came even near John Denout's home, so James returned home in the very quiet night.

The priests of Saint James cursed the *Gentenaars* who had killed other inhabitants of the town. Monks from the abbeys arrived in the Friday Market. They shouted shame over the weavers. With much harsh shouts, they forced the weavers who still stood in the Friday Market with bloodied weapons and bloodied tunics, to gather the dead and wounded to one side of the market, to the side of the church and cemetery of Saint James.

In the Leie floated strange fish. The bodies were recuperated from the water with boats and hooks. When the bodies were laid side by side, the priests and monks counted more than five hundred dead. Over one hundred wounded men were taken to the hospitals of the town.

Bad Monday ended with groups of weeping women and their young sons arriving in the Friday Market to find the bodies of their husbands and elder sons. The women came in groups, drawing carts behind them. They placed the corpses in the carts, sometimes even four or five bodies in one cart, and then the women drew the gruesome load to their houses and to houses of neighbours.

Only when they saw the women and the carts with the dead men, did the weavers tear at their hair and thought but did not whisper, 'my God, what have we done? Who has started this, why did we have to kill so many?'

The weavers found the excuse the fullers had begun the battle. They had merely defended themselves. Deep within their hearts, however, they knew their rage and madness had brought them to slay men they had known well and worked with. When one weaver suggested to raid the houses of influential fullers, he only met frowns and stern, closed faces. Nobody followed him, so the fullers who had fled to their houses were left in peace.

The only man who did not repent and who still led his militia to guard the weavers' hall and the weavers' chapel near the *Waelpoort* where he lived, was Gerard Denijs. Until the end of the evening, he ran around ordering his men about, drenched in the dried blood of other *Gentenaars*. Denijs triumphed, though he met many sad eyes, many angry eyes, and many diverted eyes.

Denijs could triumph, for he had won power in Ghent. He would be the only dean now with whom the aldermen would have to reckon with, and he could dictate the aldermen. If one massacre was not enough, he was ready to commit more slaughtering. Not once did he feel pity or repent about the dead fullers and weavers.

The men who were no weavers in Ghent, came to despise Gerard Denijs, however, and his power was in his head alone. In the following months, Gerard Denijs had to learn the hard way the aldermen and the deans of the other guilds would not follow him a second time.

The Monday of the massacre of the fullers by the weavers of Ghent, the Monday of the second of May, came soon to be known in the city as 'Bad Monday'.

The Summer Ending

In the spring of 1345, James van Artevelde and the aldermen of the large cities were worried about the new developments in Flanders. They felt the pressure of the intrigues of Count

Louis of Nevers very keenly, especially since the count was now firmly allied with the duke of Brabant. Asking the count to return to Flanders did not seem to help. The count was out for total power over Flanders.

The aldermen then sought for help from the king they had recognised as their lawful monarch, from King Edward III of England. They wanted to warn the king about the latest developments in Flanders and Brabant, warn him against the intrigues launched against his authority in the Low Countries, and ask him to come to their aid.

Catherine de Coster seemed once more indicated to travel to England and to persuade the king to come to Flanders with an army. She sailed thus for the third time from the port of Sluis, bound for London, for Gravesend. She visited the king in his palace of Westminster. Catherine drew a very pessimistic picture of the situation in Flanders and in the Low Countries to Edward.

As soon as the aldermen of Ghent heard that delegates of King Edward III, Philip of Weston and John Stury, had arrived in Bruges, they sent captain William van Vaernewijc with Peter van Coudenhove to the town, to negotiate the payment of the funds Edward had promised to Ghent, as well as the payment of the debts of the king in the city. These payments were very important to the city, for the accounts of Ghent had remained chronically negative. The captains returned to Ghent, setting out from Bruges on the fifth of July.

Edward had gathered the funds necessary for a new war campaign in France. He had paid his most urgent debts. The Truce of Malestroit had been violated too often already in many skirmishes, so he would break the truce with a major expedition. He had to that aim assembled a large fleet of about one hundred and thirty ships at Sandwich. King Edward heard what Catherine de Coster told him, sensed the urgency of her entreaties, and decided to sail for Flanders instead of to Normandy with his army.

The English fleet left Sandwich the third of July and arrived the fifth of that month at Sluis.

On the sixth of July, right after King Edward's arrival at Sluis, twenty-one influential citizens of Bruges met with King Edward. They were men from the most prominent families of Bruges, among which Gillis Lam, Gillis Priem, John of Harlebeke, Gillis Hooft, Gillis van Coudebrouck, and also Francis van Artevelde, James van Artevelde's brother, who had become a respected alderman of Bruges. The king was very agreeably surprised to hear the words of honour and support the aldermen presented him. The delegation of Bruges staged a large Flemish feast to welcome the king at Sluis. Hearing James van Artevelde's brother amidst the men of Bruges, King Edward was convinced the influence of James still acted wide.

William van Vaernewijc and Peter van Coudenhove returned from their mission at Bruges on the seventh of July, but they had not yet stepped down from their horse when they were sent out again in a hurry, now back to Bruges and to Sluis to welcome King Edward III in Flanders. They accompanied James van Artevelde, who led the delegation.

James van Artevelde, though he occupied no official function anymore in Ghent, was still the acknowledged leader of Flanders and the most famous ambassador for Ghent with King Edward. The aldermen of Ghent supposed the king would travel to Ghent, as he had done previously, to talk in the largest city of Flanders about the recent insidious actions of Count Louis of Nevers. As a sign of honour and courtesy, they wanted King Edward to feel safe and guarded by Ghent. They therefore gave James van Artevelde over one hundred men-at-arms as escort for the king during his projected voyage to Ghent.

James van Artevelde did not argue about these guards, though he felt the king had brought no doubt sufficient English archers with him for protection. The large escort might be regarded by Edward as a continued unwillingness of the Flemish cities to tolerate English warriors on Flemish territory, which was actually more of a discourtesy. A token escort would have sufficed to lead the king and his personal troops safely from Sluis to Ghent. James would have to explain to the king that no discourtesy had been intended.

At that time, James van Artevelde was seriously considering leaving Flanders for England. Although the Flemish cities had refused Count Louis's return to the county, he was not so sure this refusal would hold out long in view of the intrigues and pressure of the count. He had already heard of attempts to call the count back into the county, and James had no faith left for Count Louis. He found the count an unscrupulous intriguer, a liar, a dangerous man for the peace in Flanders. Louis would do everything, at whatever cost, to restore his power in Flanders and offer that on a silver platter to his king, to Philip of Valois! Without Flanders, the count's reputation and authority in France, at the French court, was close to nothing. James's opinion of Count Louis had fallen to an all-time low. He considered Count Louis a man who relished power out of vanity, greed and self-interest, for the sake of power, not for the sake of the prosperity of his people or the grandeur of his county. The concept of being master of a vast and wealthy county, appealed to Louis, but not the well-being of his subjects.

James had also been terribly shocked by the events of Bad Monday of the second of May. He knew very well that the loss of power for somebody like him, who had no authority of any function in the traditional way, who was not a nobleman, might mean sudden death. He should expect no mercy from Count Louis. He had no illusion about what the count would do to him, either by direct imprisonment, trial, one-sided judgement and execution, or by murder at the hand of hired killers.

James had also no illusions about the weavers who had grabbed control over Ghent. He had considered them adversaries of the count, and Gerard Denijs certainly did not want the count back in Flanders, but such men of little conviction and much opportunism, might turn with the wind like a weathercock. If Gerard Denijs was out to grab all power and authority, then James van Artevelde stood squarely in the man's way! The fame of James remained tangible, and even as strong as ever with the current aldermen.

When the city of Ghent proposed James to lead a delegation of *Gentenaars* to wish the king welcome and to ask in more detail why the king had arrived in Flanders, he accepted gladly. He prepared wagons with his preferred personal possessions, with his fortune in gold, placed his children in a chariot, pretended he wanted their mother who was with King Edward to meet her two young children, and he left Ghent with the intention to bring his children in safety, to tell Catherine de Coster to return to England, sending his cash money and his richest possessions with her to England.

James van Artevelde thus travelled to Sluis on the seventh of July with an important group of captains and men-at-arms of Ghent. He rode like a prince.

Gerard Denijs had not much objected to van Artevelde's departure, calculating that if the great man was far from Ghent, he, Gerard, would have a free hand to intrigue against the great man. He would also be considered the only remaining most powerful man in the city. During the day, however, he heard a lot of praise being uttered for James van Artevelde, the man dignified enough to talk with kings, and he heard the aldermen trusted James to speak in the name of the city. Denijs realised the combination of King Edward and James van Artevelde

might prove a prestige and power that could once more dominate Ghent. The triumphing James van Artevelde would ride into Ghent at the side of the king, surrounded by English and Flemish troops and acclaimed by the people of Ghent! He could not let that happen!

When the aldermen and deans saw James van Artevelde ride out of Ghent, Gerard Denijs looked with raging envy at the prestige the people of Ghent still reserved for the man. He began to argue van Artevelde had no official function in Ghent and could therefore not talk with the least authority to the king. He called an urgent meeting of the magistrates of the town and argued so strongly against van Artevelde's mission, shouting that power of negotiation should remain the prerogative of representatives in function. Late that day of the seventh, the aldermen gave in to Denijs' jeremiads, sending James van Loevelde and Lievin van Veurne, prominent weavers, after James van Artevelde to fetch him back to Ghent! The magistrates recalled van Artevelde under the pretence the town was putting together a larger delegation to speak with authority to the king.

James van Loevelde and Lievin van Veurne arrived too late at Sluis! James van Artevelde had already talked to King Edward on the evening of the seventh and in the morning of the eighth, so that van Loevelde, who had taken his time, met van Artevelde who was then already on his way back to Ghent, between Sluis and Ghent. James rode with van Loevelde and van Veurne back to Ghent, explained briefly to them what the king wanted, but he stayed only a few hours in town, said he had no time to talk to anyone else, gathered his last possessions, and returned to Sluis.

When James van Artevelde had arrived at Sluis, he could immediately go aboard the ship of King Edward. James found Catherine de Coster standing next to the king, watching his small boat sail alongside the *Thomas*. She greeted him cordially, but James understood her place was more natural at the side of the king than next to him. King Edward invited James to have supper with him on board the ship. Catherine de Coster did not participate, for several of Edward's counsellors and earls sat with the king.

James opened the conversation at the small table in the rather cramped up room under the forecastle of the royal cog.

'My lord king,' he began, 'in my name and in the name of the aldermen and captains of Ghent I wish you welcome in our land. The magistrates of Ghent invite you and your tenure graciously to our city, to negotiate about the actions of Count Louis of Nevers, actions which have been once more very detrimental to our county. Revolts inspired by the count have broken out in several of our smaller cities. We have already quenched some of these, but we remain constantly under pressure from the count's intrigues. The count has also reconciled with the duke of Brabant and the count of Hainault, with the aim to receive additional troops from them. We fear attacks by these troops on our border cities. Brabant and Hainault threaten Aalst, so we had to send militiamen there to strengthen our fortresses. More revolts may happen in the near future.'

King Edward sighed and bowed his head. His diplomacy, his subsidies and his written agreements with the princes of the Low Countries had not held out for long.

'Strong signs of the continuing support of your highness might help the three cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ieper to guarantee your authority in Flanders,' James insisted. 'We would welcome a charter declaring the alliance between the crown of England and the cities of Flanders to be renewed, and we would like to count on the support of your army against the

actions of Louis of Nevers, if only in a renewed declaration to that end. The aldermen of Ghent therefore invite your highness to our city, and start negotiations to these aims. Ghent have sent me accompanied by one hundred men-at-arms from our militia as a token of honour, and to protect the court during its travel and stay in our city. We hope your highness finds this escort and guidance agreeable.'

'Thank you for your kind words, Ser van Artevelde,' King Edward replied courteously, 'and I also thank the aldermen and captains of Ghent for their attention to my safety. I am particularly glad the cities of Flanders pledged to keep to my side, to uphold and defend the alliance with the rightful king of France, who I am. The cities of Flanders show their loyalty to me in a quite satisfactory way. I do not doubt Ghent's willingness to grant me protection, but I have brought my own guards. I prefer talking with the Flemish delegations here in Sluis, rather than far from my fleet. My fleet needs my attention.'

James van Artevelde sensed by this refusal King Edward was not at all certain of his safety in Ghent. The king had probably heard of the massacre on Bad Monday inside the city walls, and he had not yet fully ascertained how dangerous the influence on the count might be at work in a city such as Ghent. If James van Artevelde came asking for help, then matters in Flanders had to be fully secured before the king could risk entering Ghent. James also grasped how lonely the king was in the Low Countries, practically abandoned by his allies of Brabant and Hainault, and in doubt about the loyalty of unrestful Flanders.

King Edward continued somewhat haughtily, but not as an insult to James, 'I therefore suggest, Sir James, that you order the escort back to Ghent. So many men are costly and we will not need additional protection. Could you ask the magistrates of Ghent and of the other cities to dispatch a delegation to me? I shall negotiate a new charter for Flanders, concerning Count Louis of course, and also a charter for the support of the good cities. Besides all that, I would like to talk with you about the actions of Count Louis of Nevers. Just how treacherously is that man again harassing the cities and thwarting my interests in the county?'

James van Artevelde sighed.

'My Lord, I'm afraid Count Louis remains now and ever strongly bound to France with no hope of sympathy, understanding, or acknowledgement of your rights as king of France. He remains entirely dedicated to Philip of Valois. As long as he remained in France at the beginning of the Truce of Malestroit, peace reigned in our lands. That bliss did not last long. The count asked the cities to negotiate his return to Flanders. When the aldermen of Ghent seemed to want to accept that demand, I resigned as head-captain. Finally, the aldermen refused him, but his intrigues, his support for his followers and supporters of France, mainly noblemen of ancient families in the countryside and in the smaller cities, slowly suffocate Flanders. His actions are very insidious, planned in secret, never direct, always treacherous. The three large cities have constantly to remain alert, send troops to many places to suppress the small revolts, and these efforts have begun to exhaust our resources. The situation is alarming, indeed! Your incursion in Flanders, your assistance, the firm assertion of your authority over Flanders is very necessary. That is why we sent the embassy of my wife Catherine and implored your highness to come in a hurry to Flanders, if only for a short time. Please do not forget Brabant and Hainault have reconciled and seem to lean definitely towards France. Danger threatens Flanders from within and from its neighbouring counties. Nevertheless, the cities remain faithful to you.'

'Yes, I heard that,' Edward replied, 'but I wasn't aware the state was so perilous. I stopped my projected campaign in France and brought my fleet to Flanders. I shall give Flanders troops to smother the revolts caused by Count Louis, and show my unrelenting support for the

good cities. My envoys are talking with Emperor Lewis the Bavarian to keep Brabant and Hainault neutral so that their princes do not assist Count Louis and do not invade Flanders. I need Flanders as my ally, for I must attack France from out of these lands, or know the county not to be hostile to me when I launch assaults on France from out of Brittany or Normandy. This is for your ears only, Sir van Artevelde. A more drastic solution is necessary for Count Louis, don't you think? That man remains a thorn in our feet as long as he holds still some power and supporters in Flanders. What would you suggest?'

'Count Louis will never lean towards your highness! So much must be clear now. He will always object to the policies of the crown of England for Flanders. He remains a constant danger to your highness and to the government of the cities in Flanders. So much is certain! Yes, a drastic solution is needed. Only one solution seems possible: have the cities of Flanders confirm their allegiance to you, and have by your authority of king of France and hence of Flanders, have another count appointed, a man who is totally devoted to your highness. The king of France can depose a treacherous vassal and hand Flanders over to a more reasonable man, devoted to the people of Flanders.'

King Edward smiled. Van Artevelde had exactly worded what he had in mind.

'Have you any suggestion for who I might appoint as count of Flanders?'

King Edward looked insistently to James van Artevelde.

'Does he suspect I might propose myself as count?' James van Artevelde thought, shocked to the bone. 'I would never do that. I am not a nobleman. It might be possible in England, not in Flanders and not in France. I do not seek such honour, it is impossible, unheard of for Flanders. It is a trap! He tries to find out how far my loyalty and my personal ambitions reach.'

James answered, 'the count of Flanders should be a man of the highest birth, a knight and a count or earl. Who better than a prince of England, a prince of royal blood, to lead a prestigious, wealthy county such as Flanders?'

'So you would accept my son, the prince of Wales as your count?'

'I would gladly accept the prince of Wales,' James van Artevelde replied.

James continued with bitterness, 'I have no function anymore in Flanders, my lord. I have prestige and respect, but no official function except today as ambassador of Ghent. I believe many aldermen and influential people in Flanders may still listen to what I have to say, but such a change as you have in mind would have to be presented to the cities to be effective. The prince of Wales must be welcomed in Flanders! The people of Flanders, my lord, are an extremely conservative people, who are scared of change, do not like change. They are reluctant to change their traditions, even when these traditions are to their detriment. Many people in Flanders prefer to suffer rather than to change their habits. I will speak in favour of the prince of Wales, of course, and so will many of my friends. I am personally convinced such a replacement would be very beneficial to Flanders. The intrigues, strives, the treasons and our internal conflicts would stop. Louis of Nevers' influence can be felt in any revolt in Flanders. Once the prince of Wales declared our count, and Louis of Nevers exiled forever to his lands in France, my countrymen will find peace. Once installed, accepted by the cities, the people will be glad with their new sovereign. The malignant force of Louis of Nevers must be halted. You will have the support of the militia of the Flemish cities to campaign against France. Many people in Flanders realise and wish that, but as many not! I am not at all sure the cities will accept the change.'

'I see,' King Edward reflected. 'Well then, I'd like to receive the delegates of Ghent first, and then those of Flanders for a new charter of mutual support and for a discussion on whether a change of count is feasible in Flanders. Please tell the aldermen. I thank you, Sir van

Artevelde, for your help and advice. As always, these have been very precious to me. I will know how to reward you for your service, not only with money. I would like to have you more at my side.'

James nodded, bowing. He thanked the king. He could not but feel some vanity at the prospect of being a knight of England.

The rest of the evening passed with agreeable talk over matters of less interest. The king reiterated his willingness to pay his debts to private persons in Flanders. He confided to James van Artevelde his finances were in much better order after having waited for a year with new initiatives in the Low Countries.

James van Loevelde and Lievin van Veurne only had to report to the aldermen of Ghent what King Edward and James van Artevelde had discussed. They reported the king wanted to renew the alliance, but James had not told them about a possible deposition of the count. Gerard Denijs raged, for his scheme of isolating van Artevelde from the king had not worked. He wondered why James had only remained so short a time at Ghent.

James van Artevelde stayed at Sluis the next days, in the entourage of King Edward. He arranged for a Flemish ship of Arnout de Hert to transfer his goods and his younger children to England. Catherine de Coster would return to England in that same ship.

Three days later, on the eleventh of July, three aldermen of Ghent, including Peter van den Hovene, the captains William van Vaernewijc and Joseph Aper, a fuller, and two clerks of the city, travelled to Sluis on orders of Ghent to prepare further talks with delegates from all the cities and the king. These men also talked to James van Artevelde. James explained to them the proposal to make of the prince of Wales the count of Flanders. As James had expected, the men were much shocked by the proposition. It was something they had not thought of, and which though theoretically feasible, might be considered by the less open-minded magistrates as even more drastic than accepting Edward as their king, too far-fetched for the Flemish mind.

'I know it sounds apocalyptic,' James van Artevelde argued, 'but if you think well then it seems the solution to all our problems! It would mean no more treacherous intriguer for France in our lands!'

The Gentenaars spoke at length with the king and his counsellors, until they decided to return to Ghent to prepare the larger delegation that would discuss the text of the new charter for Flanders with the king.

By the thirteenth of July, the delegation led by van Vaernewijc had returned to Ghent.

Immediately thereafter, another delegation of Ghent set on its way to Sluis. This delegation was given the right to discuss final charters for the city. It included William van Vaernewijc, James van Loevelde and many more men. It represented several forces of Ghent. Jan van der Vloet, Lievin van Waes, Peter van den Hovene who had been captain with James van Artevelde, William de Boomere and Augustin the town clerk were members of the envoys. The delegation consisted of more than twenty men, and they had received explicitly the power to speak and decide on behalf of the city.

Members of the delegation were not Gerard Denijs, not Gillis van Gavere the captain-in-chief, and not John de Scouteete. These opponents to van Artevelde preferred to stay in Ghent to consolidate their new-found power. They were nevertheless very suspicious of what James

van Artevelde was doing so many days at the side of the king, still in Sluis. Gerard Denijs worried about that. What was van Artevelde concocting in Sluis? Since the proposal of replacing the count had come from Edward and James van Artevelde, Denijs could not but be an opposer of the scheme. Nothing that came from van Artevelde, the only man whose authority might challenge Denijs, could be beneficial for Ghent! Denijs feared some devious plan of van Artevelde. The same day he and his companions forced the magistrates of Ghent to have the captains John de Scouteete and Joseph Aper ride urgently to Sluis to order van Artevelde back to Ghent.

John de Scouteete and Joseph Aper saw James van Artevelde on the fourteenth of July. They ordered him to return to Ghent. James had no intention at all to return to the city. He wanted to sail to England and stay there for a while. He thought Ghent had become far too dangerous for him. He wanted to accompany the king to England after having weighed on the coming conference with the cities. John de Scouteete insisted, telling James he would be received with due honour and open arms in the city. Nobody in Ghent bore a grunt to James van Artevelde, de Scouteete and Aper told. James would be as safe and protected as in Sluis, still considered the wise man of Ghent. The aldermen wanted to talk with him. James let himself be persuaded. He told the captains he would return to Ghent one of the following days.

On the sixteenth of July, the delegates of the three cities met at Bruges with King Edward and his counsellors. As James van Artevelde had felt, the three cities accepted gladly to recognise again Edward as king of France. It became rapidly clear, however, the replacement of Count Louis by the prince of Wales was impossible to accept for the time being by the delegates. The delegates feared angry reactions from the people. They had plenipotentiary powers, but not to agree on such a drastic change. Louis of Nevers, however odious and dangerous for the tranquillity of Flanders, was still regarded as the rightful count of Flanders, the son and grandson of beloved and respected counts who had been very strong figures in the county. King Edward did not insist too strongly on the proposal. He would have patience, the plan rested but was not forgotten. He would also use it now as a means of putting Louis of Nevers under pressure.

The conference did decide to launch a joint expedition to expel the *Leliaerts* from Dendermonde, as well as the count's supporters. Since Count Louis was not to return to Flanders, King Edward and the cities agreed the militia of Flanders would be led as *ruwaard* by Zeger de Kortijkzaan, son of the former *ruwaard* of the same name who had been assassinated by Count Louis of Nevers. Other leaders of the militia dispatched to Dendermonde were the Sers van Praet, van Moerkerke and van Halewijn. King Edward gave them one hundred archers led by Hugh of Montravers.

Another expedition was sent to the town of Cassel to prepare the invasion of France by the English troops.

Then, the text of the charter was discussed.

The charter drawn up by the delegations of Flanders and King Edward III blamed Count Louis for having wanted to return to Flanders without doing homage to the true king of France, Edward III. The cities declared they desired to honour their obligations to King Edward, and they promised not to start negotiations with Count Louis until he had sworn fealty to King Edward. The cities recognised Edward III as their king. Edward promised to accept the count as his vassal. Should the count fail or refuse to do homage to the king, the government of Flanders should continue to be held in the same way as it had the past months,

dominated by the representatives of the three largest cities. Edward promised assistance to the three towns in case of any conflict and to maintain their authority against Philip of Valois.

The larger delegation of Ghent rode back to Ghent late on the sixteenth of July, and the same day yet another delegation, which also included some of the aldermen who had only just returned, rode back to King Edward to sign the new charter formally.

King Edward was rather satisfied with what he had achieved. Flanders, governed by the three large cities, would still be his ally. The people of the land liked him. He abandoned the idea to make of the prince of Wales count of Flanders, at least for the moment. James van Artevelde was much disappointed. He was more than ever convinced Count Louis would never stop his intrigues and he was not at all certain the actual leaders of Ghent would be able to resist to that pressure. He considered it very possible that Count Louis could charm or force the new men in power, notably Gerard Denijs, into submission. The count might flatter Denijs, agree with the man's supremacy in the town, for a while, until he could grab away that last power too. He, James van Artevelde, however, had no power left, only a fleeting authority, and he had received no assurance whatsoever from the king or from the cities for any role in the new Flanders.

James van Artevelde reflected on what he should do next. The stakes were high. Not everything of his possessions had been brought to Sluis. Since John de Scouteete and Joseph Aper had reassured him he would be welcomed in Ghent and be safe in the city, he finally decided to ride back for a few days to the town. If his fame was still much alive in the city, he might even stay in Ghent. He said goodbye to King Edward III, who continued to regard James as a friend and ally.

Edward offered an escort of no less than five hundred men-at-arms to James. The king also remained very suspicious of the several factions in Ghent, probably even more suspicious than James. James thanked the king, refused the escort for a much smaller one of a few tens of men-at-arms, saying proudly he would come to no harm. Who would dare point a finger to the saviour of Ghent? Nevertheless, the king insisted on the five hundred men, proposing the troops to wait outside the city, so that James van Artevelde could call on them in case of danger. The troops would return to Sluis after a few days. James had sent his own retainers back to Ghent, so he rode to the city with less than ten guards, which amounted to no substantial protection, but behind him marched the five hundred English warriors.

On late of the sixteenth of July, James van Artevelde arrived back in Ghent. He was still accompanied by five hundred English men-at-arms. Gerard Denijs quickly closed the gates to these men. They camped outside the gates.

Many aldermen came to talk to James, and James explained the wishes and worries of King Edward about Flanders, including the proposal to make of the prince of Wales the new count. Once more, James remarked the shock in the eyes of some of the magistrates and the acceptance of this possibility in others. The weavers were not in favour, and of course also not the knights, the landowner-*poorters* of the town.

'Our fathers and forefathers have fought to hold the county independent from the king of France,' they said. 'We have fought the Battle of the Golden Spurs and many more skirmishes for our county. Why should we now hand Flanders over, without any fight, to the crown of England, which, according to Edward, is also the crown of France, hand it over to the inheritor of the crowns of England and France? We might as well have given over Flanders to France tens of years ago!'

The aldermen organised a meeting the next day in the aldermen's hall with James van Artevelde, at which also other prominent men would be invited, including the deans of the guilds.

The meeting of the aldermen, deans and captains of Ghent started in the late morning. The aldermen who had discussed with the king and with the envoys of the other cities explained how the conference had fared. They explained the king had primarily wanted to become assured of his alliance with Flanders. The cities had generally agreed with the principle. Nobody among the men of the council of Ghent contested that view, also not Gerard Denijs. The count and his policy in favour of France seemed to have very few adherents, and the ones who had afterthoughts kept their silence. Nobody wanted to break the alliance with England and be deprived of wool. The aldermen then also agreed with the proposal of the English king demanding of Count Louis to recognise as his feudal lord Edward. This should be the first condition for the count's return to Flanders. Nobody expected the count to swear loyalty to Edward III, but nobody also desired Count Louis to return to the county.

When the proposal was brought on the table to choose the prince of Wales as count of Flanders, Gerard Denijs flared up, speaking against the proposition. He said it would be dangerous to abandon Flanders' true lord for another one, and to break the tradition of the uninterrupted line of counts.

James van Artevelde found it necessary at that point to intervene.

'Why would it be dangerous to replace a count?' he asked of Gerard Denijs. 'Did not a king start the line of counts of Flanders? It is a monarch's right to depose a treacherous count. We all know how perfidiously Louis of Nevers has governed us. Is he a Flemish count? He is French born and French educated. We have spoken often with the count and asked him to apply reason. We did not want him to encroach on our freedoms and privileges, we have even adjoined a council, the Council of Flanders, to him. We have signed charter after charter with the count, in which he guaranteed time after time our peace. Time after time we have had to assess he broke his vows and his oaths. He has time after time intrigued, manipulated, launched armed men against our wishes to hurt our interests. How long are we going to tolerate these reprehensible activities? How many lives and how much money did his activities cost to the city? Louis of Nevers is an insidious liar, who is constantly perverting the good intentions we nourished for his person and his function. Are we going, on and on, to suffer such a malicious man, let our heads be battered on and on, and never react? I say, let's have done with it! We must say to Louis de Nevers: enough! Enough! We have lost patience! We don't need this constant pressure on our cities, on our trade and on our privileges, the sole aim of which is to reinforce the absolute power of a count over his county. England, my friends, is ruled otherwise than France! The lords and the representatives of the country meet regularly in parliament with the king. They discuss together on what should be realised in the realm. Parliament decides on taxes and allows the king to wage war. The king and his earls and counsellors rule much wiser, gentler, keeping in mind the interests of the people. What we need in Flanders is a man of such inclination, somebody who cares about our well-being, our economic interests, our crafts, and our income, instead of somebody whose only aim it is to boast in a foreign court he has attained absolute power over the land. We have already an alliance with England, remember! The king of England is our rightful monarch, our feudal lord, with power to assign as count who he wishes. The step to depose Count Louis, who is so nefarious toward us, is logical, rightful, and in our interest.'

Gerard Denijs might have agreed on granting the county to an English lord, but not with James van Artevelde behind the scheme. James would again become too powerful in Ghent!

‘Aha,’ Gerard Denijs screamed, ‘you, James van Artevelde, the great van Artevelde, the haughty van Artevelde, the man who deals with kings, would want an English lord in Ghent! Is that why you brought English troops to our town? Are you out to play the dictator again in Ghent? Surely, you would serve as the first counsellor of the prince of Wales, be appointed governor in the prince’s absence, and the prince who is already immensely rich and has to rule over many lands in England and Guyenne so that he would scarcely ever be present in Flanders would grant you that function gladly! Glad to be rid of worries over Flanders and Ghent! We would have an English lord-governor in Flanders, called Ser James van Artevelde! You want to be a nobleman yourself, isn’t it, Ser James van Artevelde? Half your family is already noble, and your initiatives of remaining ever in the favour of the king of England seem very obvious to me! This is just one more manoeuvre, honourable aldermen and friends, to hand the supremacy over Ghent back to Ser James van Artevelde!’

‘No, no, no!’ James van Artevelde exclaimed. ‘I shall have no leading part in the government of Flanders. I resigned of my function as captain-in-chief of Ghent, remember? I must remind you also, though, that without my intervention and without my incessant work for the interests of Ghent, this town would now have been abandoned by more than half of its population, for it would have been a place where people starved to death! Ghent would have no cloth industry anymore, and would be extremely poor. Weavers and fullers would have moved to other places, to England, to Brabant, to Holland. I did save Ghent from perdition, and I did it much with my own money!’

‘Oh yes, oh yes,’ Gerard Denijs continued to cry, ‘you have to remind us ever of that event of seven years ago in the *Bijloke*, don’t you? How many times do we have to hear that story? We must owe you our lives for eternity, isn’t it? We must forever do as you like and want, because we have to be grateful!’

Gerard Denijs looked around him with wild eyes filled with hatred, leaning over the table to impress more the aldermen.

He seemed to be out of arguments, but then he continued, ‘you speak of money! Where has all our money gone? Ghent is heavily indebted to many wealthy traders, because so much money fled through careless fingers, your fingers, Ser van Artevelde! Where has the money of Ghent gone? You and Gelnoot van Lens have been paid substantial amounts by England! Where is all that money, stolen from the treasury behind our backs, gone to?’

‘I am no Ser and never will be,’ James shouted. ‘I did not receive more money from England and from Ghent than I had to spend in the service of town and lord. I have brought in all justifications to the accounts of Ghent. This is an accusation that has already been brought to the aldermen by van Steenbeke, and for which van Steenbeke has been banned from the city for fifty years! As at that time, Denijs, I say: show me the evidence of theft, show me proof, Gerard Denijs, of expenses unduly made and of money stolen from Ghent!’

‘How in heaven’s name could I do that?’ Gerard Denijs exclaimed, arms wide open. ‘For so many years, your own wife controlled and dictated the accounts of the city! Isn’t your wife also in England?’

‘I am no thief! I always held the interests of the city above my own!’ van Artevelde cried, and he brought his hand to the side where usually he held his sword, not here, however, not now. ‘I hold you personally accountable for the money squandered, lost and spent to the glory of the grand lord you seek to be,’ Denijs hissed.

‘Friends, friends, friends,’ Maes van Vaernewijc intervened, ‘this sterile dispute must end! We can conclude this meeting. We remain the faithful allies of King Edward. We agree Count Louis can return, but to pledge to the honour of the rightful king of France, who is Edward.

We feel Count Louis of Nevers remains our rightful count. We do not want him deposed, not yet. If you all agree with these points, this is what our delegates will tell King Edward when they sign the new charter King Edward has asked for. If you agree with these decisions, this meeting can be adjourned and I urge everybody to guard the peace in our town!’

The aldermen, captains and deans agreed.

Gerard Denijs continued to fulminate with high shouts and broad gestures of his arms against his friends, pointing at James van Artevelde. James ignored the man. He calmly said goodbye to the magistrates who were still devoted to him, would have liked to kill Denijs there and then, regretting not to wear a sword, and then he left the hall.

James van Artevelde walked slowly to his house in the *Kalanderberg*, his anger subsiding. He could accomplish nothing anymore in this city against the evil forces. He was sad, but he convinced himself he had always done the right thing, so his conscience was at peace. His friends of the Pharaïldis group had been right when they had warned him! He would not stay long in Ghent. He could make his last dispositions and then leave for England with his family. He could stay for a year, maybe longer, and trade out of one of the small, agreeable cities near London. He reached his house, locked his door, sat in his hall, and thought of what he still could do to prepare his voyage. He spoke with his servants. He went to the second floor. He dozed off in a chair.

Suddenly, he heard much noise in the street. Many feet shuffled in the *Kalanderberg*. Then he heard shouting and cursing, loud voices, and he thought he heard his name be called. James went to his window and opened it. He looked down. He saw a few hundred men in arms beneath him, filling the street. He recognised mostly weavers among them. At their head shouted Gerard Denijs and his friends.

Denijs noticed James at the window.

He screamed so that the whole street could hear, ‘James van Artevelde, come down! Come into the street! Come and give us account of the money the king of England has given you! Give us account for the squandering of the treasury of Ghent! What have you done with the money of Ghent you have stolen? Tell us what you did with our money!’

James shouted from the open window, ‘I have never taken for myself one single pound from the treasury! On the contrary, I have paid for our militia and for the food of the army often from my own money! If you want proof of my expenses, and know what Ghent paid me, I can give you the justifications, hand over proof to you all, from the accounts of the town. The books are kept in the town hall of Ghent, not in my house. If you come back tomorrow to the aldermen’s hall, I and the city receivers will gladly show the books and the accounts to your representatives!’

Gerard continued crying, ‘give us proof now, here! What have you done with the treasure of Ghent? You have been bought by England to send the treasure of Ghent to England! Where has the money gone?’

James van Artevelde shouted over the heads, ‘good people of Ghent, you all once swore to fight with me and to protect one another in battle! You want to assault my house now? Do you want to kill me? You could do that easily, for you are hundreds of men and I stand here alone and without guards. Do you really believe killing me will solve anything? Accounts can be given under oath by the aldermen of Ghent! I will submit to their judgement. Have you forgotten already how much and how well I served you? When Ghent was starving, I brought you wool, grain, I gave you back your crafts and I upheld your freedoms and your charters,

and added many to them. Now, go home you all, and live better still, while allowing me to serve Ghent!’

The crowd under his window shouted ever louder, excited by Gerard Denijs who continued insulting James and accusing him of treason.

James van Artevelde then realised he could never turn this mad crowd by fine and just words. His only safety lay in escape. He closed the window while he heard axes break his front door. He stood a moment in utter panic, and then he ran to the rear of his house, to where his stables were. It was unlikely, he thought, the weavers had run in the street to the rear of his house, in the *Paddenhoek*. Where to flee to? He could run by the *Paddenhoek* to the *Fremineuren* Abbey, to the Franciscans, where Gerolf Vresele the monk resided. He could ask for asylum in the abbey. The crowd would stop at the abbey, for the abbey’s ground was holy, and the asylum an old, respected habit.

James ran downstairs, into his stables. He heard his door crash, and then people scream, also screams of pain and agony were heard. Members of his family lived in his complex of interconnected rooms. Those were being murdered, he heard. His servants and maidservants might be killed at this very moment!

James ran on, and reached his stables. Suddenly, also from that side people ran into his house. James realised he was trapped.

The first man he encountered in his stable, he recognised as the saddle-maker Thomas Denijs, a far relative probably of Gerard Denijs. Thomas was a man who had nurtured a grudge against him for many years, for business failed and for a member of his family executed for thievery while on campaign.

The man swung an axe which slammed against James’s skull. James was dazed. He fell to the ground. The iron points of *goedendags* pierced his spine. James’s eyes closed and all became dark.

Epilogue

The corpse of James van Artevelde was brought to the *Bijloke* convent and later entombed in a small village very near Ghent, in the Carthusian abbey of Rooighem, by definition a very quiet surrounding. His tomb was placed near the tomb of the *ruwaard* of Flanders Zeger de Kortrijkzaan who had been executed on orders of Count Louis of Nevers. Over the centuries, these tombs were lost.

Catherine de Coster remained in England after James’s death. Her property was temporarily blocked. In November, King Edward III granted her the pension of one hundred pounds her husband had received, until she had recovered her possessions in Flanders. Catherine de Coster’s properties were not confiscated in Ghent. Heavy taxes were imposed on the supporters of James van Artevelde, notably on the family of Gelnoot van Lens.

James’s sons John and James, the children of James’s first marriage, as well as Catherine’s son Philip, went to exile in England. Also John de Coster joined his sister in London. Other friends and servants of James sought refuge in England, fearing reprisals in Gent. Among them was also James’s brother William. They received small sums of money from King Edward.

None of these stayed in England for long. After months to a few years, they returned to Ghent.

The charter for Flanders King Edward III had wished was signed by the representatives of the cities two days after James van Artevelde's murder.

King Edward III sailed from Sluis on the twenty-fourth of July, still shocked by the death of James van Artevelde, but comforted in his conviction he had secured Flanders as an ally to the crown. He sailed to France, but was caught in a heavy storm so that his fleet was thrown back to the English coast, two days later. King Edward postponed his invasion of France.

Envoys of the Flemish cities travelled to Westminster to apologise for the assassination of James van Artevelde, and to express their condolences to the king.

The militia of the cities attacked the towns Hulst and Axel of the *Vier Ambachten*, the Four Crafts. They captured the towns on the *Leliaerts*.

The new *ruwaard*, Zeger de Kortijkzaan, laid siege to Dendermonde, captured it, and he marched at the head of his troops to Aalst to stop the *Leliaerts* from taking power in that city. Dendermonde escaped destruction only by promising it would henceforth open three breaches of forty feet wide in its walls in the direction of Ghent.

The danger that Count Louis of Nevers represented for the cities was thus energetically called to a halt. The count fled once more to France. The duke of Brabant hurried to renew his alliance with the Flemish cities.

On the third of August of 1345, King Edward III declared himself very satisfied that his alliance with Flanders had been confirmed in a new charter, his power stabilised.

At the elections of the aldermen of Ghent on the fifteenth of August of 1345, most of the aldermen chosen by the electors were opponents of James van Artevelde. The new captains also functioned as receivers, as had been the case during the van Artevelde regime.

Gerard Denijs, the dean of the weavers, became the new *Beleeder der Stede*, the manager of the town, the man in power in Ghent, as once James van Artevelde had been.

Author's Notes

'De City – The Captain' 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 are pure fiction.

James van Artevelde was married a first time to a lady of whom the historians have not yet discovered the name. I let him be married to a Vresele daughter, a fictional character.

The genealogy of the van Artevelde as mentioned in the first pages of this book must remain approximate. I have mostly only mentioned the names of figures used in this novel. The van Artevelde clan was large in the fourteenth century. Napoleon De Pauw mentions in his 'Cartulaire historique et généalogique des Artevelde' (Havez, 1920) no less than one hundred and eight names of van Artevelde, their wives and husbands, and their children. His list of names more or less strongly connected to the van Artevelde, is longer still, about two hundred and twenty names.

The families de Grutere, Soyssone, Sleepstaf and Stocman mentioned in this book did exist in Ghent in the fourteenth century, and were antagonistic to the van Artevelde.

The sea-battle of Sluis has been largely forgotten as one of the major battles of the Hundred Years War of the fourteenth century. For the numbers of ships involved, I found the largest disparity of numbers mentioned in the French fleet. Figures as far apart as two hundred to eight hundred ships have been cited in literature; for Barbavera's galleys alone the figures quoted are from three, four, six over thirteen to thirty. The most reliable numbers for the French fleet seemed to me about two hundred cogs, six galleys, and about two hundred other, smaller ships, to a total of about four hundred ships. The most reliable figures for the English ships may amount to one hundred sixty cogs plus an undefined number of smaller boats, to a total of somewhat less than four hundred. Though some scholars mention the attack of the Flemish fleet of Sluis in the rear of the French, the chroniclers of the times did not. The numbers of twenty thousand men killed in the French fleet and four thousand for the English fleet, seem plausible. The escaping French ships, pursued by Jehan Crabbe, have been numbered as from thirteen to thirty, meaning a truly catastrophic disaster for the French navy.

There is no evidence to be found in the chronicles of any conspiracy directed against Queen Philippa during her stay in Ghent, even though certain forces in Ghent and in Flanders certainly worked against the influence of the king of England in the county. That paragraph of the novel is fiction entirely.

King Edward III indeed quartered his standard of the golden lions with the lilies of France in the Friday Market of Ghent. The lilies remained in the standard until the early nineteenth century. King George III officially abandoned the title of 'King of France' only in 1801, and the *fleurs-de-lys* were abandoned. France had by then no monarch anymore, and the United Kingdom recognised the French Republic. Currently, the royal standard holds the English golden lions in quadrants with the harp of Ireland and the red lion of Scotland.

Catherine de Coster's English mission did happen, as other such missions to the sovereigns she accomplished, and she indeed was caught in a shipwreck and saved, but Richard Fitz Alan, earl of Arundel, was not with her on her trip to Brittany.

The term of 'the Low Countries' was not used in the fourteenth century. I needed a term to indicate Flanders, Brabant, Hainault, Holland, Zeeland, Guelders, Namur, the prince-bishopric of Liège and Jülich in two words instead of each time having to mention all these counties by name. I thought the term of 'the Low Countries' formed a convenient, brief wording.

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.

The geography of Flanders and Zeeland was very different in the fourteenth century from what it is now. Large sea-bays entered into the land, allowing towns such as Sluis and Damme to be harbours with access to the sea. A sea-bay also cut deep into the land of what is now called 'Zeeuws-Vlaanderen' near Axel. Currently, these towns are situated far inland. The land called Walcheren in Zeeland was then still an island, as were the lands in front or north of Sluis, which formed the large, low island of Cadzand.

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).