The Mud and the Arrows

Eight Voices from Agincourt

Normandy and Northern France

November 1414 – February 1417

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he to-day that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother.

— William Shakespeare, Henry V, Act IV, Scene III

History is written by the victors.
The dead write nothing at all.

— Unknown

Author's Note

This book is a work of fiction set against the factual backdrop of the Agincourt Campaign of 1415. The characters who populate these pages are invented, though the events they describe—the siege of Harfleur, the desperate march to Calais, and the astonishing English victory at Agincourt on the feast of Saint Crispin—are drawn from the historical record. Where real figures appear, such as King Henry V, Constable Charles d'Albret, or Dafydd Gam, their actions are based on the accounts of contemporary chroniclers.

Eight fictional diarists offer their perspectives on events that reshaped the political map of Europe. They are English and Welsh, French and Venetian; soldiers and civilians, clergy and merchants. Some survived; some did not. Their languages and worldviews differ, but they share the common experience of living through a hinge moment in history—one of those rare occasions when the expected outcome did not occur, and the consequences rippled outward for generations.

Publisher's Note

Pocket Memoirs grew out of a personal project to learn about the Battle of Chosin Reservoir — and the realisation that this is a good and easy way to learn about historical events. The content is both human-and AI-made; we strive to give you the best of both worlds. All characters are fictional, the events are not. We cross-check everything for accuracy, but if you spot any issues, do not hesitate to reach out via contact (at) pocketmemoirs (dot) com.

Please note: the historical realities depicted in these books are not always appropriate for minors. All content on this site should be considered unsuitable for younger readers. Parents and guardians are advised to read or listen to the material themselves before sharing it with children.

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Sir Robert Aldington

Man-at-arms in the retinue of Edward, Duke of York

A soldier's first allegiance is to his lord and his king. If God wills it, the rest follows.

15 November 1414

Word came today that His Majesty means to reclaim Normandy and his rightful throne of France. The Duke of York is in high spirits, and I confess the prospect stirs my blood. I have served His Grace these ten years and more, and never have I seen such purpose in him. The preparations begin in earnest—armor to be checked, horses to be readied, and men to be mustered. England has not seen such an enterprise in living memory.

God willing, we shall restore what was lost and prove English arms supreme. My wife wept when I told her, but I think she understands the weight of duty. A soldier's first allegiance is to his lord and his king.

12 August 1415

The crossing! At last we have embarked from Southampton with the fleet, near twelve thousand strong. The sight is beyond reckoning—masts stretching from horizon to horizon, and the ships riding low with men and supplies. I stand on deck beside His Grace the Duke, and he speaks

of glory and conquest with such certainty that doubt seems a coward's weakness.

My stomach lurches with the motion, but not from fear—only from the restless excitement of it all. The French have no notion of what comes for them. We shall make them answer for every slight, every lost holding. The men are in spirits, singing and laughing. Even the seasickness cannot dampen their mood.

16 August 1415

We have landed at Chef-en-Caux without significant resistance. The Norman countryside stretches before us like promised land, green fields and stone villages and the smell of France upon the air. The local folk fled at our approach, abandoning their homes and goods.

His Grace leads us toward Harfleur with measured determination. I ride near him, and he speaks often of the town's strong walls and stubborn garrison. The men march in good order, confident. We know not yet how dear this confidence will prove.

25 August 1415

The siege has become our entire world. Harfleur squats behind its walls, mocking us. We have thrown up our siege lines, and the bombardment continues daily—the great cannons roar, and dust rises from the walls where the stones are struck. But the French hold stubbornly.

Meanwhile, something worse than any French soldier creeps through our camp. The sickness began a week past—men complaining of flux, fever, the violent discharge of their bowels. At first we thought it merely the rough change in food and water. Now lads are dying, and there is not enough ground to bury them with proper rites. I have thus far been spared, though many of my tent-mates are laid low. His Grace remains resolute, and we must do likewise.

8 September 1415

The dysentery is a plague upon us. More die each day than fall to French arrows. I have seen strong men, men I have fought beside for years, reduced to hollow shadows in a fortnight. The physicians bleed them and administer draughts, but nothing avails. One does not speak of it—there is a grim fatalism now in the camp.

His Grace moved among the men yesterday, and his presence steadied them. He does not flinch from the sickness nor from the mounting toll. I believe him when he says this is the price of the enterprise, though my heart grows heavier with each passing day. Harfleur still holds, though its end cannot be far distant.

22 September 1415

Harfleur has surrendered. The French garrison marched out with colours cased, and our soldiers entered the gates in triumph. Yet I felt no jubilation. The town is half-destroyed from our bombardment, the streets filthy with the evidence of siege, and the faces of the remaining citizens show nothing but despair.

His Grace speaks now of marching toward Calais, of continuing the campaign. But how? We have lost so many to sickness that our army is half what it was. The men are weak, their spirits tested. Yet this is war, and soldiers do not question their orders.

12 October 1415

The march to Calais becomes a desperate race. We move as swiftly as we can with weakened men, ever watching the roads for French movements. They mass against us—we have learned through scouts that a great host gathers. The Somme lies ahead, and all our routes forward are blocked or contested.

My legs ache perpetually, and the men grow hollow-eyed with hunger and exhaustion. But there is also a strange exhilaration—we are few and

surrounded by enemies, yet we press on. His Grace rides at the front, his armor gleaming even when fouled with dust.

19 October 1415

Crossed the Somme. Alive. Barely.

24 October 1415

We have found them. The French army lies near a village called Agincourt, and we shall give battle on the morrow. The men are curiously calm, though I detect fear beneath the surface. We have few enough cavalry and no reserves. The French have both in abundance. But our longbowmen—they are worth their weight in gold, and they know it.

I have spent the evening checking my armor, sharpening my blade, and writing down my will. If tomorrow is to be my final day, let it be written that I faced it without shame. I can hear the French trumpets in the distance. They are so numerous we can see their campfires stretching across the fields like the stars made earthbound. God preserve us all.

25 October 1415 — evening

The arrows. Thousands upon thousands, blackening the sky. The French cavalry charged into that storm and fell like wheat before the scythe. Those who reached our lines were broken upon our pikes and bills. I fought in the thick of it beside His Grace the Duke of York, and never have I seen a man more magnificent in battle.

But then he fell. Not to enemy blade, but trampled beneath the weight of bodies in the press. I reached for him, but the tide of battle swept me onward. When at last the French broke and fled, I returned to find him still, his armor dented and fouled. He had fought so well. He deserved better than to be crushed in the mud.

The victory is complete—thousands of French dead, their nobility captured or slain, their army shattered. But I cannot rejoice. The Duke is gone.

23 November 1415

London celebrates us as conquerors, and the King rides through the streets in triumph while crowds roar their approval. Twenty thousand citizens at Blackheath, they say. We have been paraded before cheering thousands, and the city echoes with our names.

Yet I stand among them in a kind of daze. The Duke of York does not ride beside me to hear the cheers. Neither do a thousand others who sailed from Southampton in August. The glory is real, but so is the cost. I have written to the Duke's widow expressing my condolences. What else can a man do?

14 March 1416

Five months have passed since Agincourt, and I find myself at leisure in the countryside, tending to estates the King has rewarded me with. The wound in my shoulder troubles me less now, though it aches in the rain.

I have had time to think on all that has transpired—the landing, the siege, the march, and above all the battle. I believe now that we witnessed something greater than ourselves that day. Not merely a military victory, but something of destiny. His Grace the Duke understood it. He went to his death with perfect certainty.

I shall not forget him, and I shall endeavor always to live as he did—with honour and devotion to duty.

Sir Robert Aldington continued in royal service after Agincourt, transferring his allegiance to the household of the young Henry VI following the death of his patron, Edward, Duke of York, on the battlefield. He received a modest grant of lands in Hampshire as reward for his service during the campaign, supplementing the small estate his family had held for two generations. In the years that followed, he participated in Henry V's subsequent Norman campaigns of 1417–1419, serving at the sieges of Caen and Rouen, and was present at the signing of the Treaty of Troyes in May 1420, though he held no diplomatic role and attended in a purely military capacity. He married Eleanor Beauchamp in 1418, somewhat late for a man of his station, and fathered three children—two sons and a daughter. His eldest son, William, would later serve in the English garrison at Rouen during the turbulent 1430s. Aldington himself retired from active campaigning around 1425, his shoulder wound from Agincourt having never fully healed; the joint stiffened progressively, and by his fifties he could no longer wield a sword effectively. He spent his final decades managing his estates and attending to local affairs as a justice of the peace, earning a reputation for fairness if not warmth. He was known locally for his annual observance of Saint Crispin's Day, when he would attend Mass alone and dine in silence, refusing all company. He died in the spring of 1451 at the age of approximately sixty-eight, having outlived most of the men he had fought beside. His grave in the parish church at Aldington bears the simple inscription: 'He served.' The Duke of York's death at Agincourt haunted him throughout his life, and those who knew him reported that he rarely spoke of the battle except to say that the Duke deserved better than to be trampled in the mud. His will, preserved in local records, left his armour to his eldest son and a small bequest to the parish church for Masses to be said on Saint Crispin's Day in perpetuity.

Marguerite Lefèvre

Wife of Jean Lefèvre, cloth merchant of Harfleur

They took the town. Then they took everything else.

10 March 1415

The cloth trade is good this year. Jean has received a shipment of fine Flemish wool, and the local nobility are eager for it. We have been married eight years now, and I have learned the business of buying and selling well enough that Jean says I have a better eye for quality than any of his previous factors—though he says this mostly when he has had wine.

Harfleur is prosperous and secure. The walls are strong, and the garrison is well-maintained. We hear talk of troubles in England with the young King, but it seems distant and unreal. Mon Dieu, life proceeds in its natural rhythms. I am content.

20 August 1415

They have come. The English fleet appeared on the horizon three days ago, and now their army encamps before Harfleur with terrible purposefulness. We have watched from our windows as they construct their siege lines with methodical precision. The garrison assures us the walls will hold.

Jean has packed our valuables, though he does not admit he fears. The women and children huddle in groups, speaking in low voices. Nobody trusts what will happen. I have never seen soldiers in such numbers, and their presence transforms everything, makes all of normal life seem like a dream we are waking from. The sound of their camp carries on the wind—hundreds of voices, the clink of armor. C'est le son du destin.

29 August 1415

The bombardment began. The great cannons on the English siege lines roar without ceasing, and the sound shakes the buildings themselves. Dust rises from the walls where the stones are struck. We cowered in the cellar for hours, listening to the thunder. When we emerged, part of the street market had been destroyed. Old Margot's stall is buried under rubble.

The garrison moves soldiers along the walls frantically. Governor de Gaucourt attempts to reinforce us, we are told, but the roads are blocked. Jean paces constantly, saying nothing. I prepare what food I can. Mon Dieu, quand cela finira-t-il?

4 September 1415

The walls show cracks. Each night I wake to the sound of cannon fire in my dreams before realizing the noise continues in reality. We have moved our household to the cellar. The water from the well tastes of stone dust. Food is becoming scarce—the market is closed, the fields outside are no longer accessible.

A merchant's wife such as myself is accustomed to comfort, to having things of quality, to never wondering where the next meal comes from. Now I stand in line with servant girls for hard bread and salted fish. The shame of it is almost worse than the fear.

10 September 1415

The sickness has come into the town. Whether it is from the fouled water or the fear itself, I cannot say, but children and elderly are dying. There is a smell in the air now that I cannot describe—like death itself has taken physical form and settles over Harfleur. I have seen people alive yesterday lying in the streets today. The living have not the strength to bury them properly.

I wrap my face in linen soaked in vinegar and venture out only when absolutely necessary. Jean grows paler and thinner. He says nothing of his symptoms, but I see him gripping his belly when he thinks I am not observing.

14 September 1415

Another night of cannon fire. Jean grows worse. Mon Dieu, mon Dieu.

17 September 1415

Jean cannot rise from his bed. The fever has taken hold of him fully now, and he calls for water constantly. I tend to him and I pray and I try not to see the truth in his eyes. The garrison negotiates terms—de Gaucourt has sent emissaries to the English camp. The town cannot hold much longer.

Outside, the bombardment has slowed. Perhaps the English know they have won. Perhaps they are merely waiting for us to accept what everyone already understands. C'est fini.

22 September 1415

Harfleur has surrendered. The English enter the gates tomorrow. Jean is still alive, though barely conscious. I have not told him. What good would it do? Some of the garrison men fought with such valour, and now it ends not with glorious last stand but with a negotiation.

I should feel relief, but I feel only emptiness. What happens to us now? I have hidden what little gold we still kept in the cellar. I have dressed in plain clothes, made myself invisible. Tomorrow our life ends.

27 September 1415

They have expelled us. The English King has ordered that all French inhabitants be driven out of Harfleur to make room for English settlers. We are to go with nothing but what we can carry. Jean is too weak to walk. The soldiers took him by the arm and forced him into the street with the others.

I clutch our few possessions and follow the column of the wretched—old people, women, children, all turned out like unwanted dogs. My home of fifteen years sits behind me, and English soldiers already walk through it as if it were their own. Dehors. Out.

2 October 1415

Jean died on the road two days ago. A kind priest said words over him while we rested beside the road. I cannot weep anymore.

The other refugees speak of returning eventually, of the war ending, of life resuming. I do not believe them. Nothing normal will exist again. I am a widow, possessionless, homeless. Voilà le prix.

28 October 1415

News comes of a great battle near a place called Agincourt. The English, outnumbered and desperate, have shattered the French army completely. Thousands of French dead, they say. The news should bring me some bitter satisfaction, but it does not. How many of those soldiers were fathers? How many left behind women as I was left behind?

The English King has proven his point. He can defeat any force France sends against him. Mais qu'est-ce que ça accomplit? I still have no home. Jean is still dead.

3 January 1416

I have found work in Rouen as a seamstress. My fingers are rough now, not suited to fine work, but there is a merchant's wife here who remembers my family and has shown mercy. The pay is meagre, but it keeps body and soul together.

I have stopped thinking about returning to Harfleur. That Harfleur is gone. In its place is an English town, English soldiers, English settlers. I did not perish during the siege, nor on the refugee road, nor from starvation after. Perhaps the Almighty has some purpose in keeping me alive. I am thirty-four years old, and I feel ancient.

15 June 1417

Almost two years since the English came. The duchy changes slowly—new fortifications, English governors, French nobility negotiating rather than fighting. They speak of a treaty that would make Henry of England King of France itself.

I do my sewing, tend to a small garden, attend Mass on Sundays. Life returns, though diminished. I sometimes wonder what happened to our house, to Jean's business, to the life we built. A merchant and his wife in Harfleur—we seemed so substantial. Maintenant, nous ne sommes que des fantômes.

Marguerite Lefèvre survived the siege of Harfleur, the expulsion of its citizens, and the death of her husband Jean on the refugee road south. She arrived in Rouen in mid-October 1415, destitute and ill, and was taken in by the household of a cloth merchant named Guillaume Tessier, who had traded with Jean Lefèvre before the war. She found employment as a seamstress, her skilled hands proving more valuable than her diminished social standing. Over the following years she rebuilt a modest life, eventually establishing her own small tailoring business serving the wives

of Rouen's merchant class. She took on two apprentices and was known for the quality of her work with Flemish wool—a material she understood better than most, having handled it for years in her husband's shop. She never remarried, though she was not yet forty when the war ended at Harfleur. When Henry V's armies returned to Normandy in 1417, Rouen itself came under siege, and Marguerite experienced the horror of bombardment and starvation for a second time. The city held out for six months before surrendering in January 1419, during which period an estimated twelve thousand of its citizens died of hunger and disease. Marguerite survived this second siege as well, having learned from Harfleur the arts of rationing, concealment, and endurance that no woman should have to learn twice. She lived quietly under English rule for the remainder of her life, adapting to each new occupier with the pragmatism that had kept her alive. She died in approximately 1441 at the age of sixty, and was buried in the churchyard of Saint-Maclou in Rouen. Those who knew her in later years described a woman of few words and considerable resilience, who kept a small painted wooden box—empty—that she said had once held cloth samples from her husband's shop. She never returned to Harfleur.

Hugh Calverley

Archer in the English army, recruited from Lancashire

Going to cross the sea itself, see strange lands. What could be better than adventure and coin?

12 April 1415

Got took on by the King's recruiters today at the fair in Lancaster. Me and Thomas both—they wanted strong backs and good eyes. Said we'd be famous archers, part of an army that would teach the French a lesson they'd not soon forget. The sergeant showed us English coin, real gold, more than I'd see in a year of field work.

Signed the mark, got our first pay, and now I'm a soldier of England. My ma wept, but there was pride in her eyes too. Never thought much about France before, but now I think on little else. Going to cross the sea itself.

11 August 1415

The fleet is something beyond reckoning. Hundreds of ships—I've never seen so many people in one place, let alone all packed onto vessels meant for the sea. Me and Thomas are assigned to one of the supply ships with other bowmen.

King Henry himself walked past our gathering yesterday, straight-backed and gold-clad, and even I felt it—felt like we're part of something

huge. My bow is good ash wood, and my arrows are sharp. I've practised since I was knee-high, and I'm as good a shot as any in the shire. The sea makes my stomach peculiar, but by Christ, I'm ready.

16 August 1415

France! We've landed in Normandy, and I've set foot on foreign soil. The beach is rocky and cold, not like I imagined. The sergeants are barking orders, and we're forming into companies. There's French soldiers in the distance, but they're not trying to stop us.

The officers say we're marching on a town called Harfleur, and their walls won't stop English arrows. Thomas is scared—I can tell by how quiet he's gone—but I'm thinking about stories, about glory, about coming home with enough coin to buy land.

30 August 1415

The siege is fierce and tedious all at once. We shoot at the walls, they shoot back, and mostly nothing happens. The bombardment from the cannons is deafening. I've seen men take arrows and fall like sacks of grain. Harfleur's walls are thick though, and they hold.

We're camped in mud that stinks of horse dung and unwashed men. Food is hard bread and dried peas. Thomas says it's better than what we'd get in Lancashire, but my belly doesn't care. The worst thing is the waiting—waiting for orders, waiting for the enemy, waiting for glory that doesn't come.

7 September 1415

Sickness is moving through the camp like a demon. Three men from my company died yesterday. One minute they're cursing the food, the next they're burning with fever, and by nightfall they're cold permanently. The physicians say it's the flux from the water, or bad air, or God's judgement. I don't much care what they call it.

Thomas has gone quiet, which means he's scared. Me too, if I'm honest. We came here to fight Frenchmen, not to die in the mud. My guts have been loose the past two days, but I'm not telling anyone. They'll pull me from the line.

14 September 1415

It's getting worse. Thomas can't hold anything down, and he's burning hot even when it's cold. I've been trying to help him, but there's nothing to do. The surgeons have given up even pretending to have cures—they just mark the sickest men and move on.

I feel it working in me now too. My legs are weak, and my head swims. All I can think about is water, and how bad my guts hurt. Yesterday I saw old Wat, who taught me archery in Lancaster, just lying in the dirt too weak to rise. Nobody helped him.

20 September 1415

Thomas died this morning. Just stopped breathing. I held his hand because there was no one else to do it.

22 September 1415

Harfleur fell. I heard the cheering from the sick tent. Didn't even have the strength to rise and look. We're supposed to march now, they're saying. Leave this cursed town and go to Calais. Half the army can barely stand. The glory of England feels very far away.

8 October 1415

The march is killing us. Those of us still alive—maybe five or six thousand now out of the twelve that sailed—we shuffle forward like ghosts. I can barely hold my bow. My legs don't obey me properly anymore.

The other lads don't speak much. We just walk. Eat what hard bread we can manage. Drink when we find water.

I don't think about Lancashire anymore. I don't think about glory. I think about lying down and not having to get up again.

13 October 1415

Left behind. Too weak. Mother, I'm sorry.

15 October 1415

They marched on without me. I can hear the army moving north through the trees, the sound growing fainter. A French peasant woman gave me water. She didn't speak English and I don't speak French, but she looked at me and she knew. The sky is very blue today. The pain has stopped, mostly. I think that means something. I wish I could tell Thomas about the sky.

Hugh Calverley died on or about the fifteenth of October 1415, somewhere along the road between the Somme crossing and the village of Agincourt. He was one of thousands of English soldiers who succumbed to dysentery during the campaign, a disease that killed far more men than French weapons ever did. The bloody flux, as the English called it, was caused by contaminated water and unsanitary camp conditions, and it struck with particular ferocity during and after the siege of Harfleur. His body was likely left beside the road, as the army could not afford to halt its desperate march to bury its dead. No grave has ever been identified, and it is probable that local French peasants eventually buried him in an unmarked plot, if he was buried at all. He was approximately twenty-two years old. His companion Thomas, mentioned frequently in his diary, had died of the same illness during the siege of Harfleur on or about the twentieth of September. Neither man's family received formal notification of their deaths; the recruitment records from Lancashire list both as having been

mustered in April 1415 and note only that they did not return. Hugh's mother, mentioned in his final entry, lived in a village near Lancaster. Parish records indicate she died in 1423, never having learned the precise circumstances of her son's death. The gold coins Hugh was promised as pay were never collected—they remained on the rolls of the Exchequer, a bureaucratic ghost of a life that ended in a French ditch. His longbow, a weapon of English ash that he had practised with since childhood, was presumably taken by another archer after his death, as good longbows were too valuable to leave by the roadside. Of the twelve thousand men who sailed from Southampton, roughly half survived the campaign. Hugh Calverley was not among them. He never saw the battle that would make the campaign famous, never heard the arrow storm that broke the flower of French chivalry, never learned that the wretched march he could not finish ended in one of the most celebrated victories in English history.

Jean de Marle, Seigneur de Vaudreuil

French knight, distant cousin of Charles d'Albret, Constable of France

Mon cousin porte la France sur ses épaules, et les imbéciles la lui arrachent.

22 November 1414

The court is a theatre of fools. His Majesty Charles suffered another episode last week—raving, tearing at his garments, convinced his bones were made of glass. The physicians bled him and he recovered somewhat, but he is a shadow of a king. Meanwhile the Armagnacs and Burgundians circle like wolves.

Mon cousin Charles d'Albret carries the burden of Constable with a patience I could not muster. He says the English king makes demands that no sane ruler would accept—Normandy, Aquitaine, the crown itself. C'est de la folie. But Charles says we must prepare regardless. The young Henry has ambition, and ambition in a king is a dangerous thing.

18 August 1415

The English have landed. Twelve thousand men at Chef-en-Caux, and they march on Harfleur. The court receives the news with something between outrage and amusement. The Duke of Orléans declares he will personally drive them into the sea. The Duke of Alençon speaks of crushing them before autumn.

Mon cousin is less theatrical. He sits in council and listens to the young nobles boast, and says little. Afterward, privately, he tells me: the English have good archers, a determined king, and nothing to lose. We have everything to lose and no agreement on how to fight. Voilà notre problème.

12 September 1415

Harfleur holds, but barely. Reports speak of terrible bombardment and disease on both sides. The English army is being ravaged by dysentery—perhaps three thousand dead or incapacitated already. Some at court suggest we need only wait for the English to destroy themselves.

But Charles shakes his head. He understands something the young nobles do not: a cornered army is the most dangerous kind. Henry will not simply sail home. He will march, and when he marches, we must be ready. Mon cousin has begun assembling forces, quietly, without the fanfare the dukes prefer. Il prépare la guerre pendant que les autres jouent.

25 September 1415

Harfleur has fallen. The court is furious but also, I think, secretly relieved—now the English have a town to defend, which means a garrison to drain their strength. Henry expelled the French citizens, a cruelty that has hardened resolve among the nobility.

The mobilisation accelerates. Letters go out to every corner of the realm. The feudal host is summoned. Charles works ceaselessly, coordinating the movement of forces to intercept the English march. If Henry moves toward Calais, we shall meet him on the road. C'est certain.

3 October 1415

The muster swells daily. From every province they come—Picardy, Champagne, Brittany, even the Burgundian marches send men, though Duke

John himself does not ride. The question of Burgundy hangs over us like a second enemy. If John the Fearless chose this moment to strike Paris, we should be fighting on two fronts.

Charles says he cannot worry about the Duke of Burgundy and the King of England simultaneously. He chooses the nearer threat. The English army leaves Harfleur on the eighth, our scouts report. They are weakened—perhaps six or seven thousand effectives, half of them sick. Mon cousin permits himself a rare smile. The trap is set. Nous les tenons.

8 October 1415

Henry marches. Our riders shadow his column along the Norman roads. The English move quickly despite their weakness—they cover fifteen miles a day, hugging the coast toward Abbeville and the Somme crossings. Charles has sent forces ahead to block the fords.

I ride with the main body of the army, and the sight of it stirs me despite my misgivings about the command. Fifteen thousand men-at-arms, crossbowmen, knights in full harness—the flower of French chivalry assembled as it has not been since Poitiers. We are magnificent. Whether we are competent is another question. Alençon rides at the front as though this were a tournament, his banner snapping in the wind. Mon cousin watches him and says nothing.

14 October 1415

We have blocked the Somme crossings. The English are trapped south of the river, forced to march inland. Our scouts report their army is weak—six thousand men at most, half of them sick. The trap closes.

But the command is fracturing. My cousin Charles urges caution: shadow them, cut their supply lines, force them to surrender without battle. The Dukes of Orléans and Alençon demand a decisive engagement. They want glory. Honour. The old chivalric dream. Charles says to me:

they have never fought the English longbow. They think war is a tournament. Ils vont nous tuer tous avec leur orgueil.

20 October 1415

The English have crossed the Somme. They found a ford at Béthencourt that we failed to block. A failure of coordination—too many commanders, too little unity. Charles is angry, though he conceals it behind his usual composure. The young dukes blame each other. Nobody blames themselves.

We converge now toward a place near the village of Agincourt. The English march north. We shall meet them there. Our numbers are overwhelming—twenty thousand men or more against their wretched six thousand. The mathematics should settle the matter. But mathematics require competent commanders, and I am no longer certain we have them.

23 October 1415

The armies are nearly in contact. Our scouts can see the English column, thin and ragged, moving through the autumn landscape. They look beaten already. The men in our camp are in high spirits—drinking, gambling, already dividing the ransoms they expect to collect.

Charles does not drink. He studies the terrain—a narrow field between two patches of woodland. The ground is soft from days of rain. He says to me: this field favours the defender. The English will use it. They will plant stakes for their archers and wait for us to come to them. We must not oblige them.

But I know already that the dukes will not listen. Ils veulent la charge.

24 October 1415 — evening

The night before battle. Our camp is enormous—fires burning, men shouting, dice rattling. The noise carries for miles. Across the field, the English camp is silent. Dark. Barely visible.

Charles stands at the edge of our lines, looking across at that silence. He says nothing. I stand beside him. The contrast is terrifying—our noise speaks of confidence, but the English silence speaks of something else. Of men who have nothing left except the battle itself.

Tomorrow, the young dukes will lead the charge. They have overruled Charles's plan entirely. It will be a frontal assault, the whole mass of our chivalry hurled against six thousand exhausted men. Charles believes it is a mistake. I believe him.

But we are French, and we will fight. Mon cousin et moi, côte à côte. My cousin and I, side by side. That is enough.

25 October 1415 — dawn

The field is narrow. The mud is deep. The English wait behind their stakes. Que Dieu nous garde.

25 October 1415 — written in haste, before the charge

The trumpets sound. The Duke of Alençon raises his sword and the line surges forward. Charles rides beside me, his face set like stone. He knows what is coming. He has always known.

The English archers stand in their rows behind their wretched stakes, and I can see them nocking their arrows with the calm of men performing a daily task. The mud pulls at our horses' hooves. The distance is perhaps three hundred yards. I think of Isabelle. I think of the vineyard at Vaudreuil in autumn.

Charles turns to me and says: stay close, cousin.

The arrows begin to fall.

Jean de Marle, Seigneur de Vaudreuil, died on the field of Agincourt on 25 October 1415, crushed in the press of the French advance. His body was recovered three days after the battle from one of the mass burial pits near the village of Agincourt, identified by the arms on his surcoat—three gold martlets on a field of blue. He was thirty-eight years old. His cousin, Constable Charles d'Albret, died in the same engagement, his body found near the centre of the French line where the fighting had been most desperate. The two men had served together in various campaigns since 1405, and d'Albret had relied on Jean as an informal counsellor, particularly in matters requiring political discretion at a court riven by factional disputes between the Armagnac and Burgundian parties. Jean's frustration with the French command structure, documented extensively in his diary, was shared by many of the experienced soldiers present at Agincourt. The decision by the younger French nobles—most notably the Dukes of Orléans and Alençon—to override d'Albret's cautious strategy, which called for harassing the English flanks and cutting their supply lines rather than mounting a frontal assault across muddy ground, is widely regarded by historians as one of the critical errors that led to the catastrophic French defeat. Jean's wife, Isabelle, received word of his death in early November through a returning squire. She managed the family estates at Vaudreuil alone for the next twelve years before their eldest son, also named Jean, came of age. The Seigneurie de Vaudreuil remained in the family's possession until it was confiscated by English authorities during the Norman occupation of 1417–1419, after which the family retreated to properties in the Loire valley. Jean's diary was reportedly found among his personal effects in the saddlebags of his horse, which survived the battle, though this provenance may be apocryphal. He was one of approximately six thousand Frenchmen who died that day—more than perished on the English side in the entire campaign.

Brother Edmund Hale

Benedictine chaplain attached to the English army

I was told it would be an honour to serve God and King in France. God, perhaps. The King, certainly. Honour is another matter entirely.

3 April 1415

The Prior has informed me that I am to accompany the King's army to France as chaplain. He presented this as a great honour, which I received with the appropriate expressions of gratitude and humility. Inside, I felt something considerably less pious. I am forty-seven years old. I have spent twenty-two of those years within these walls, copying manuscripts, teaching boys their letters, and cultivating a garden that requires precisely as much attention as I wish to give it.

Now I am to trade all of this for mud, blood, and the spiritual care of men whose primary relationship with God consists of asking Him to help them kill other men. The Prior assures me it will broaden my understanding. I suspect it will broaden my understanding of exactly how unpleasant human beings can be to one another.

14 August 1415

We have landed in France. The army is in high spirits, convinced of the righteousness of its cause and the inevitability of victory. I have bles-

sed the banners, said prayers over the troops, and administered communion to several hundred men who, I suspect, will need it rather more than they presently imagine.

The officers speak of Harfleur as though it were a ripe fruit waiting to be plucked. I have read enough history to know that besieged towns are rarely so cooperative. But it is not my place to counsel military strategy. My place is to provide spiritual comfort and to record, if only for myself, the gap between what men say and what actually happens.

1 September 1415

Two weeks of siege, and the first bodies are arriving at my makeshift chapel—not from French arrows, but from dysentery. The men call it the bloody flux, and it kills with a thoroughness that would impress the most dedicated French crossbowman. I have administered last rites seven times today. Seven men whose great adventure in France consists of dying from the consequences of drinking contaminated water.

The irony is considerable. They sailed across the Channel to die gloriously for England, and instead they die inglouriously in a ditch, soiling themselves. War, I am learning, has very little interest in the narratives we construct about it.

15 September 1415

Richard Courtenay, Bishop of Norwich, died today. The bloody flux has claimed a bishop. I presided over the prayers alongside the other clergy, and I watched men weep who would never weep for a common soldier. The Bishop was a good man and a faithful servant of the King. But he died of the same disease that has killed hundreds of anonymous archers, and he died in the same undignified manner.

I found this oddly consoling. Not the death itself—that was tragic and wasteful. But the democracy of it. The flux does not care about rank or title or the colour of one's vestments. It simply kills.

22 September 1415

Harfleur has fallen, and I am expected to give thanks to God for the victory. I did so. I conducted the service with appropriate solemnity and genuine gratitude that the killing has paused, at least here.

But then I watched the King expel the French civilians—women, children, the elderly, the sick—onto the roads with nothing but what they could carry. I watched them stumble past my chapel, and some looked at me, a man of God in English vestments, and their eyes asked a question I could not answer.

1 October 1415

We remain in Harfleur while the King deliberates. Some say we should garrison the town and sail home. Others counsel a march to Calais to demonstrate mastery of Norman territory. The King, being Henry, chooses the bolder course.

I have spent the week tending to the sick who remain—those too ill to march but too stubborn to die. One boy of perhaps sixteen asked me whether God had abandoned them. I told him that God works through physicians and clean water, not through abandonment. He seemed unconvinced. So was I, if I am being honest. But honesty is a luxury a chaplain cannot always afford.

10 October 1415

We march. The army that sailed twelve thousand strong is now perhaps six thousand walking corpses who happen to still be breathing. The road to Calais stretches before us like purgatory made geographical. I walk among them, offering prayers that taste of ash.

The confessions I hear are remarkable. Not for their sins—soldiers' sins are boringly predictable—but for their honesty. These men are terrified. They believe they will die in France, far from home, and they want

someone to hear them say so. I listen. That is the only useful thing a chaplain does in a war: listen.

18 October 1415

We have crossed the Somme after days of searching for a ford. The French army shadows us, growing larger by the day. Our scouts report their numbers at twenty thousand or more. We are six thousand.

I have stopped attempting mathematics.

22 October 1415

Fourteen confessions today. Fourteen men certain they will die this week. I am running out of reassurances.

24 October 1415 — evening

Tomorrow we fight. The King has made his speech, and the men are quiet—not the quiet of despair, but something deeper. They have accepted what is coming. I spent the evening hearing confessions. Every man wanted to speak. Some gave me letters to carry home. Some simply wanted to be told that God saw them.

I told them what they needed to hear. Whether it is true is above my station to determine.

The French camp burns with light and noise across the field. Our camp is dark and still. There is something in that contrast that unnerves me. We are the silence before something terrible.

25 October 1415 — afternoon

I watched from behind the lines as the archers released their arrows and the sky went dark with them. The sound was unlike anything in my experience—a rushing, hissing noise, as though the air itself were being torn apart. The French charged into it and fell.

The battle lasted three hours. Three hours of noise and mud and slaughter that will take three lifetimes to forget. The King fought in the melee himself, his crown dented, his armor bloodied. The Duke of York died in the press. And then the French broke, and it was over.

I walked among the dead afterward, offering what prayers I could. The field was carpeted with French bodies in their fine armor, lying in the mud like discarded toys. Thousands of them. I stopped counting.

25 October 1415 — evening

The King ordered the prisoners killed. There had been a raid on our baggage train, and Henry feared the captives might rise against us. So he commanded that the French prisoners be put to the sword. The knights refused—it was beneath their honour. So the archers did it. Two hundred archers with knives and mallets, moving among unarmed men.

I stood and watched. I should have protested. I should have invoked God, mercy, the laws of chivalry. I said nothing. I watched men who had surrendered be cut down where they knelt, and I said nothing at all.

I do not think I shall ever fully account for that silence.

23 November 1415

London. The King enters in triumph, and twenty thousand citizens cheer at Blackheath. Pageantry, choirs, banners, the Agincourt Carol ringing from every church. The city celebrates a miracle—God's own victory over the French.

I stood in the crowd and watched the procession pass, and I thought of the field at Agincourt, of the bodies in the mud, of the prisoners on their knees. I thought of the men who died of dysentery in ditches while the heralds composed their songs of glory. The gap between this celebration and that reality is so vast that I wonder whether they describe the same event at all.

14 March 1417

I have been back at Glastonbury for more than a year now. The garden needs attention. The novices need instruction. The manuscripts need copying. Life within these walls proceeds as it always has, governed by the bells and the seasons and the unchanging rhythm of monastic discipline.

I should be at peace. I am not.

The Prior asks occasionally whether the campaign has enriched my spiritual life. I tell him yes, because it is easier than explaining that I watched men die in mud, held the hands of boys who called for their mothers, and stood silent while prisoners were slaughtered. I do not know what that has done to my spiritual life. I know only that it has not enriched it.

On Saint Crispin's Day, I shall go to the infirmary and tend the sick. I shall do this every year, I think, until I die. It is the only response I have found that does not feel like a lie.

Brother Edmund Hale returned to his monastery at Glastonbury in December 1415 and resumed his duties as a copyist and instructor of novices. He never spoke publicly of his experiences during the Agincourt campaign, though his prior noted in the house records that Edmund had returned 'much altered in spirit, as though he had seen things for which the Rule provides no remedy.' He continued his monastic life for another twenty-three years, producing several notable illuminated manuscripts—including a particularly fine Book of Hours commissioned by a local nobleman—and gaining a reputation as a demanding but fair teacher whose novices consistently demonstrated superior literacy and theological understanding. His cynicism, which his diary suggests was already well-developed before the campaign, deepened into a quiet, persistent scepticism about the claims of earthly power, though it never curdled into despair or impiety. He attended Mass faithfully, observed the Hours without complaint, and performed his duties with meticulous care. He was known

to absent himself from the monastery chapel on Saint Crispin's Day each year, spending the day instead in the infirmary tending to the sick—a habit he never explained and his brothers learned not to question. In 1420, when news of the Treaty of Troyes reached Glastonbury, Edmund reportedly said only: 'How many more must die before this treaty dies as well?' He was, by all accounts, correct—both Henry V and Charles VI were dead within two years, and the treaty's provisions collapsed within a generation. He died in 1438 at the age of approximately seventy, having never left England again. His final years were marked by increasing withdrawal from communal life, though the novices under his care remembered him with unusual affection, noting that he treated them as thinking adults rather than children to be drilled. His grave in the monastery cemetery bears no epitaph, which those who knew him considered entirely characteristic. The killing of the French prisoners at Agincourt, which he witnessed and recorded in his diary, appears to have been the defining moral crisis of his life. He never resolved it, and the silence he maintained on that October afternoon haunted him more than any other memory of the campaign.

Giovanni Contarini

Venetian merchant and trade factor, based in Bruges

A merchant must sail with the winds that blow, not the winds that should blow.

15 January 1415

Word reaches Bruges that the English king prepares a great fleet. Our wool factors in London report unusual activity—armor being forged, provisions gathered, ships conscripted. Henry the Fifth means to reclaim his ancient claims in France. Che cosa sciocca. Yet this troubles our markets.

If he sails, the Channel becomes uncertain. French privateers grow bold. We watch the Flemish carefully—Duke John sits between thrones like a merchant weighing accounts. The wool trade could suffer greatly. My ledgers already anticipate disruption.

22 August 1415

News that the English fleet sailed on the eleventh of August. Twelve thousand men, our factors report. They are bound for Normandy, landing near Chef-en-Caux. Here in Bruges, the first tremors of consequence ripple through the Hanseatic houses. Flemish merchants who trade with Normandy grow nervous.

The King of France musters his forces, though slowly—sempre lentamente, the French. Already the routes to Dieppe and Le Havre are becoming uncertain. My wool shipments face delays. Madonna mia, this will be an expensive war.

5 September 1415

The English king besieges Harfleur. A formal siege—not a rout, but a slow, methodical thing. They have invested the town. Our news comes from merchant captains who skirt the edges of the conflict. Harfleur's harbour is closed to commerce.

This is the blow I feared. The port is vital for the wool trade. The French have not yet come to relieve the town. Come dire? I am provisioning for a long disruption. My partner Giacomo fears we shall lose six months of shipments.

27 September 1415

Harfleur has fallen. The English king took the town after a siege of more than a month. Reports speak of plague within the walls—dysentery that killed more men than swords. Henry expelled the French citizens and garrisoned English soldiers. Terribile.

But I confess a cold calculation: if the English hold Normandy, our wool trade may recover more predictable routes. The French court is fractured, the nobility quarrels. In chaos, sometimes opportunity.

21 October 1415

Extraordinary news. The English king is trapped south of the Somme, forced to march inland while a vast French army converges. Our merchants in Amiens write in barely controlled excitement. The armies are nearly in contact near a village called Agincourt.

The French numbers are overwhelming—twenty thousand or more against the English six thousand. This is no longer border skirmishing.

This is the collision of kingdoms. Dio ci aiuti. I wonder if we shall hear the outcome before winter closes the routes entirely.

28 October 1415

Non è possibile. The English and French fought at Agincourt on the feast of Saint Crispin. The French have been crushed. Utterly crushed. Six thousand or more French dead. The English casualties are negligible. Henry himself fought hand-to-hand.

Great French nobles taken prisoner—the Duke of Orléans himself, captive. The ransom economy alone will reshape finance across Christendom. Families of immense wealth now depend on the caprice of Henry's negotiations. Sei mila morti. Six thousand dead. I sit in my counting house and the numbers do not add up to anything that makes sense.

31 October 1415

Il colpo.

8 November 1415

The true scope becomes clear. Henry did not merely win a battle—he has overturned the military calculations of an age. The French mounted cavalry is devastated. The English archers, common men from Wales and the shires, have proven themselves the superior force.

This changes tutto. Every court in Europe recalculates. Burgundy's Duke John watches Henry with new eyes. Venice watches. Our military clients reconsider their strategies. And the wool trade—with Henry victorious and Normandy under his control, the northern routes become English-protected. It is a bitter thought: I am profiting from slaughter.

25 November 1415

Henry has reached Calais and sailed for England. Our sources report he was received in London with extraordinary ceremony—twenty thousand citizens greeting him at Blackheath. The English believe their king has conquered France.

Politically, he is immensely strengthened. Financially, the ransoms will fill royal coffers. Commercially, I must adjust our entire framework. The French nobility is fractured. For Venetian merchants, stable English rule in Normandy is preferable to French disorder. Yet I confess disquiet. Wars, even victorious wars, leave scars on trade.

14 June 1416

The ransom treaties proliferate. The Duke of Orléans awaits negotiation for his vast ransom. The capital flowing into England is extraordinary. English banks overflow with gold. Che cambiamento.

Peace talks proceed. Henry is to be named heir to the French throne if he marries Catherine of Valois. If this holds, the political map of Europe remakes itself. Venice must decide: does she profit more from English ascendancy or French recovery?

3 December 1416

The Venetian Senate meets on the matter of trade agreements with England. The question is no longer whether to treat with Henry, but how favourably. My recommendation: very favourably indeed. He is reshaping the continent, whether we like it or not.

A merchant must sail with the winds that blow, not the winds that should blow. Agincourt was a year ago. The world has not stopped trembling yet.

Giovanni Contarini continued to operate as a Venetian trade factor in Bruges until 1423, when he returned to Venice to take a position in the Collegio, the executive committee of the Venetian Senate. His dispatches from Bruges during the Agincourt campaign and its aftermath were preserved in the Venetian state archives, where they provide a valuable merchant's perspective on the disruption of northern European trade during the Hundred Years' War. Contarini's commercial instincts proved sound: the English victory at Agincourt and the subsequent Treaty of Troyes did indeed create more stable trade routes through English-controlled Normandy, and Venetian merchants were among the first to exploit them. He made his fortune primarily in the wool trade between England and Flanders, supplemented by smaller operations in wine, salt, and spices, and by a profitable sideline in the brokerage of ransoms for captured French nobles—an industry that flourished in the years following Agincourt. He married late, at the age of fifty-two, to Caterina Morosini, the daughter of a minor Venetian patrician family, and fathered two sons, both of whom entered the family trading business. He spent his final years as a respected if minor figure in Venetian commercial society, known for his detailed ledgers and his distinctive habit of recording political events in the margins of his account books—a practice that has made his commercial records of interest to historians as well as economists. He died in Venice in 1434 at the age of sixty-three, of a fever contracted during a particularly harsh winter. His observations about the ransom economy following Agincourt—particularly the immense sums flowing into English coffers from the captivity of the Duke of Orléans and other French nobles—anticipated by several years the formal economic analyses of later historians. The total ransoms from Agincourt prisoners exceeded one hundred thousand pounds, a staggering sum that reshaped the financial relationship between England and the continent. Contarini understood this immediately, while the diplomats were still composing their congratulatory letters. He never visited the battlefield.

Dafydd ap Maredudd

Longbowman, recruited from Brecon, Wales

I can shoot straighter than anyone in three valleys. That much is true. The rest, we shall see.

22 June 1415

Mustered at last. The commissioners came through Brecon recruiting for the king's army. I was working my father's land when they asked if I'd serve. Fifteen years past, Owain Glyndŵr's war against the English didn't go well for Wales, and most men my age grew up hearing tales of that failure.

But the king—Henry himself—was born in Wales, or so they say. Born in Monmouth. So here's the jest: we Welsh are being asked to fight for an English king against the French, because he's Welsh enough by birth to count. Duw, beth yn y uffern. I can shoot straighter than anyone in three valleys, though. The pay is decent. So I signed.

12 August 1415

The fleet gathers at Southampton. Thousands of men crowd the docks—men-at-arms in bright armour, commons like me with our bows, supply wagons, horses, enough chaos to remind you why God invented patience. I've never seen the sea close. Diawl, it's enormous.

I'm supposed to sail on that? The ships creak and shift. Men sick already just from standing on them. Give me solid earth and enemies I can see, and I'll show you what Welsh arrows can do. Give me a boat and I'll show you what a Welshman looks like when he's green.

15 August 1415

On the water. Duw, cadw fi.

20 August 1415

Landed without the sea killing me, which I count as a personal victory over nature. Chef-en-Caux. The beach is rocky and wrong. Now we march toward Harfleur.

The officers say it's a port city, well-fortified. The men are in good spirits. The armour glints. It all feels rehearsed, like a mystery play in the village square, except the weapons are real and everyone's taking it terribly seriously. I sharpened my arrows at Southampton. Those arrows have killed rabbits and the occasional deer. Now they're meant to kill men. Beth ydw i'n gwneud yma?

8 September 1415

The siege wears on. The walls don't want to fall. The king has cannons—great bronze things that roar—but stone walls don't surrender quickly. Meanwhile, we archers work constantly. Making arrows. Sharpening arrows. Fetching arrows that missed. My fingers are raw.

The whole camp is becoming one vast arrow-making factory, which is a curious thing when you think about it. Thousands of men with the combined expertise to shoe horses, plough fields, build houses, and compose music—and we've been reduced to a single purpose: sharpening sticks. The dysentery doesn't help. Three men from my company are dead. Not from arrows. Uffern.

23 September 1415

Harfleur fell yesterday. The king expelled the French citizens—women, children, elderly—right onto the roads. I watched them leave. Ragged and bewildered. The king says it's strategic. I call it hard. But I've learned in six weeks that what I call it doesn't matter.

The town's ours now. The rest of us march inland. The king intends to reach Calais and sail home, all in one season. It's bold. The men like it. Calais is English already, so marching there is almost like coming home. Except we'll arrive as conquerors, which is a fine distinction that I suspect the French won't appreciate.

6 October 1415

The march is miserable. Rain constantly. The roads are mud. My boots are rotting. Half the army is weaker than it should be—fever, dysentery, exhaustion. We're five or six thousand effective fighting men now, down from the twelve thousand that sailed.

The officers won't say it, but they're worried. We hear the French are gathering ahead, blocking our way. Diawl, I didn't sail across the sea, starve through a siege, and ruin my boots just to get turned back. The king seems confident enough. Hard to tell with officers. They smile the same whether they're walking into an ambush or a feast.

17 October 1415

We're trapped at the Somme. Main crossing at Abbeville is blocked by French forces. So we march inland, following the river south, looking for a way across. Miserable slog. Rain hasn't stopped.

My bow is oiled carefully—I've learned that much—but everything else is damp. In the village of Voyennes, we found a crossing. The French didn't expect us to go that far inland. We got across. Duw bendithia. The thing about armies is they're like sheep—they go where you expect

them to go, and when they don't, everyone acts surprised. We didn't go where we were expected. Simple as that.

24 October 1415

Camped between two villages—Tramecourt and Agincourt. The French army is opposite us, maybe a mile away. Their numbers are… uffern. Enormous. We're six thousand, perhaps fewer. The king walked through the camp tonight. I saw him. He looked tired but certain.

We sharpened stakes all afternoon—cut pieces of wood, sharpened them, planted them at an angle in front of our lines. The idea is to stop cavalry. It's simple. It should work. But the number of men across that field… Beth os nad yw e'n gweithio?

I check my arrows. Eighty. Digon, I hope.

25 October 1415

We won. Ni enillodd.

The French charged, and we killed them. The cavalry came at us and the arrows fell—not like rain. Rain is gentle sometimes. This was a wall of iron-tipped ash moving at the speed of thought. Ten thousand shafts in the first minute, and then ten thousand more. The horses screamed. The riders fell. The men-at-arms advanced on foot and sank into the mud, and we kept shooting until there was nothing left to shoot at.

The melee was chaos. I emptied my eighty arrows. My fingers are bleeding from the string. The mud was red. I killed men today. I don't want to think about it.

Dafydd Gam died in the fighting. I knew him. Brave man. Stupid-brave, the kind that gets songs written about you and your wife weeping at the hearth. Gorffwys mewn hedd.

We lost maybe two hundred. They lost thousands. I don't understand it, but I'm grateful for it.

5 November 1415

Waiting to sail from Calais. Wounded men being treated. Prisoners managed—nobles waiting to be ransomed. The common soldiers who captured them are dreaming of becoming rich, which is reasonable enough, since rich is what they'll be.

I took no prisoners. Too busy with arrows. The king says we sail next week. Diawl, boats again. At least the crossing from Calais to England is short.

Then I can go home to Brecon and tell the story the way I want to tell it, not the way it actually happened. That's the privilege of surviving.

20 December 1415

Home. The valley looks the same. Smaller than I remember. Greener. The people greet me differently now—I'm a man who sailed across the sea and killed Frenchmen and came home.

I don't feel different inside. I still hate boats. I still hate rain.

The story I told in the tavern made people laugh. I added a few things for the story's sake. The killing part I kept simple. Peth trist. But the celebration, the feast, the king's triumph—those are true enough.

Tomorrow I'll go back to the land. The fields need work. I'll carry the mud and the blood in my mind, but my hands will be in Welsh soil again. Twym. Right.

Dafydd ap Maredudd returned to Brecon in late 1415 and resumed working his father's land in the valley below the Brecon Beacons. He was among the approximately four hundred Welsh archers who fought at Agincourt, recruited from the Lancaster lordships in South Wales despite the lingering tensions from Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion, which had ended barely a decade earlier. The political context of Welsh service in Henry's army was complex: Glyndŵr himself was still unaccounted for in 1415,

and governmental control of north Wales remained incomplete, making the recruitment of any Welsh troops a calculated risk on the part of the English crown. Dafydd never served in another campaign, though he was approached by recruiters for Henry V's subsequent Norman expeditions in 1417 and politely declined, reportedly saying he had seen enough of France to last several lifetimes. He married a woman named Gwenllian from a neighbouring valley in 1416 and fathered five children, three of whom survived to adulthood. His eldest son, Hywel, inherited the family land and expanded it modestly. Dafydd became known locally as something of a storyteller, holding court in the tavern at Brecon where his account of the battle grew marginally more dramatic with each telling, though those who knew him noted that he never embellished the killing itself, only the absurdities surrounding it. He continued to practise archery throughout his life and is recorded in local documents as having won the Brecon fair's shooting competition every year from 1416 to 1432, a streak of sixteen victories that became a point of considerable local pride. His longbow, reportedly the same weapon he carried at Agincourt, was preserved by his family and hung above the hearth in the family home for several generations before being lost. He died in approximately 1458 at the age of about seventy, a considerable age for the period. His grave in the churchyard at Brecon has not been identified, but the indenture listing his name among the Brecon contingent survives in the National Archives.

Père Raoul de Tramecourt

Parish priest of Tramecourt village, Picardy

I buried them. That is all I can say. I buried them.

18 May 1415

Summer approaches gently. The fields grow thick with grain. Tramecourt settles into the rhythm of the season—small harvests, repairs to the church roof, the annual feast day for Saint Laurent. I spend my days saying Mass, hearing confessions, counselling the village folk.

The wood beyond the eastern edge of our land remains as it has for a hundred years—thick with oak and beech, a boundary between our parish and the wider world. C'est la paix. Distant rumours come sometimes—about a king in England preparing ships, about disputes between the great nobles. But such matters seem far from Tramecourt.

14 September 1415

The first refugees came today. A family from Harfleur, perhaps two days' journey south, fleeing what they say is an English siege. The father is wounded—an arrow in the shoulder, infected. His wife is thin, almost hollow. Two children, silent and frightened.

I gave them shelter in the church undercroft and tended the wound as best I could. Dieu nous aide. The village is afraid now. More refugees

will come. The wood beyond our land no longer feels like a boundary. It feels like a refuge.

10 October 1415

Forty souls shelter in and around Tramecourt now—refugees, families fleeing the English advance. My people gather at the church constantly, asking if I have heard news, if the English are coming, if we should flee. I have no answers. I counsel patience and prayer.

Seigneur, garde-nous. But my prayers sound thin even to my own ears. The harvest was interrupted. Fields lie partly reaped.

23 October 1415

The armies have come. French forces have gathered not a league away, near the villages to the south. English forces approach from the west. Tramecourt and Agincourt—our twin villages—sit between them.

The French have made camp in and around us. Soldiers everywhere. Their fires light the sky at night. The smell of so many men, so many horses, rises like a miasma. I have told everyone to hide in the church tomorrow, or in the cellars. The Book of Revelation comes to mind unbidden. Et j'ai vu quand l'Agneau ouvrit le sixième sceau... My faith feels fragile now.

24 October 1415 — night

The noise from the French camp is immense. Thousands of voices, laughter, the clatter of armour being prepared. They are confident. They outnumber the English perhaps four to one. The fires burn so brightly that the sky above our village glows orange.

Across the field, toward Agincourt, the English camp is silent. Dark. I can see nothing there, and the silence frightens me more than the noise. What manner of men sit in darkness before a battle they cannot win?

I have locked the church doors and gathered what people I can into the undercroft. We will pray through the night. Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison.

25 October 1415 — morning

Miserere nobis.

25 October 1415 — evening

The battle. I hid in the church as I instructed the people. The noise was like the gates of Hell opening. Arrows fell like rain. The ground shook with cavalry charges. The screaming of men and horses continued for hours. I knelt before the altar and prayed, and the prayers dissolved into Latin—Kyrie eleison—and those dissolved into silence because there were no words sufficient.

By midday the chaos moved east, toward the open field between the two villages. By evening it had stopped. I ventured out.

What I saw has burned itself into my mind. Mon Dieu. Mon Dieu.

26 October 1415

The field is a field of the dead. Thousands. French knights and men-at-arms, still in their armour, lying in the mud in heaps. The English have withdrawn. The field belongs to the dead.

I have been walking among them since dawn, blessing what bodies I can, speaking the Dies Irae over and over. Some are still dying—mortally wounded, waiting for mercy. I give them what comfort I can. The village has begun to emerge from hiding. The people weep. Their fields are a graveyard.

Que Dieu me pardonne for surviving it.

28 October 1415

The dead must be buried. The French have left men and oxen to help. Vast pits are being dug in the fields—mass graves, though grave is a word that implies dignity. We are shovelling bodies into the earth.

I move among them, speaking the words when I can, my voice hoarse, my heart numb. Some are identifiable—nobles, their arms marking them—but most are simply the anonymous dead. In manus tuas, Domine. I commend thousands of spirits.

31 October 1415

The great burial pit is nearly full. An old field to the southeast of the church has become a grave for perhaps four thousand of the French dead. The exact number is impossible to know. I counted bodies until the counting became mockery, and then I stopped.

The children are pale. The women weep quietly. The men work in grim silence. The grass will grow over it come spring. But it will not be normal land. It will be sanctified by tragedy. Requiescant in pace.

15 November 1415

The last burials were completed three days ago. The field is quiet now in a way that feels unnatural. Crows come to the burial sites. I chase them away. The village attempts to return to ordinary rhythms, but ordinaire has been replaced by something darker.

The harvest was never finished. Winter approaches. There will be hunger. The Harfleur family whose wound I treated has stayed—they have nowhere else to go. The father sometimes stands at the edge of the village, looking at the grave pit. I understand the impulse.

20 June 1416

Eight months have passed. The grave pit remains, grass slowly creeping over it. Peonies grow there—pink and white—blooming above the dead. La vie continue.

The village rebuilds. New planks for the church roof. Fields replanted. I speak of forgiveness in my prayers, but I do not know if I truly forgive what happened here. I am a different priest than I was before the twenty-fifth of October. Whether that change is toward wisdom or toward darkness, I cannot say.

Tramecourt will never again be a simple village. It will always be the place where thousands died in a single day. And I will be the priest who buried them.

Père Raoul de Tramecourt served as parish priest of Tramecourt for forty-one years, from 1398 until his death in 1439. He was present for the Battle of Agincourt, which was fought in the fields directly adjacent to his village on 25 October 1415, and spent the following weeks helping to bury the French dead in mass graves near the church. The precise number of dead interred near Tramecourt is unknown, but estimates range from three to five thousand. Père Raoul conducted burial rites over these graves daily for nearly two weeks, assisted by villagers, refugees, and a small detachment of French soldiers sent for the purpose. The experience, by his own account, transformed him fundamentally. He continued his ministry in the years that followed but was noted by his bishop during a pastoral visitation as having become 'excessively contemplative and given to long silences during the Mass,' and was gently counselled to resume his pastoral engagement with the living. He never fully did so, though he remained attentive to the material needs of his parishioners, organising relief during the harsh winter of 1415–1416 when the unfinished harvest led to food shortages. Each year on the anniversary of the battle, he held a special Mass for the dead, which attracted mourners from across Picardy and became a regional tradition that outlived him. The village of Tramecourt itself was damaged

during the battle—fences destroyed, fields trampled, livestock scattered, several outbuildings burned—but was never formally besieged or sacked. It recovered slowly over the following years, though its population declined as younger families left for less haunted ground. Père Raoul remained. He spent his final years tending the mass graves, ensuring the ground was kept clear of undergrowth and that simple wooden crosses marked the burial sites. He died in his sleep in the winter of 1439, aged approximately seventy-four, and was buried in the churchyard of Tramecourt, less than two hundred paces from the men he had spent his life remembering. His grave is no longer identifiable, but the mass burial pits near the village have been confirmed by modern archaeological surveys and remain a site of quiet remembrance.

- 11 August 1415: King Henry V sails from Southampton with approximately 12,000 men and 1,500 ships, the largest English invasion fleet since Edward III's campaigns.
- 14–17 August 1415: The English army lands at Chef-en-Caux in the Seine estuary and begins disembarking on the Normandy coast.
- 18 August 1415: The siege of Harfleur begins. Thomas of Lancaster, Duke of Clarence, encircles the town from the east while Henry bombards from the west.
- 15 September 1415: Richard Courtenay, Bishop of Norwich and close advisor to Henry V, dies of dysentery during the siege—the most prominent English casualty of the epidemic.
- 22 September 1415: Harfleur surrenders after five weeks of siege. Henry expels the French civilian population and garrisons the town with English soldiers.
- 8 October 1415: Henry departs Harfleur with roughly 6,000–9,000 men, marching north toward Calais. His army is severely weakened by dysentery and casualties.
- 13–19 October 1415: The English find the Somme crossings blocked by French forces near Abbeville. After days of marching inland, they cross the river at Béthencourt and Voyennes.
- 24 October 1415: The English and French armies converge near the villages of Agincourt and Tramecourt. The French force numbers approximately 20,000–25,000 men.

- 25 October 1415 (Saint Crispin's Day): The Battle of Agincourt. Henry deploys roughly 6,000 men, eighty percent of them longbowmen, across a narrow muddy field flanked by dense woodland. The English advance to within 300 yards and unleash a devastating arrow storm. French cavalry charges collapse in the mud. The French men-at-arms, advancing on foot in heavy armor, are slaughtered in their thousands.

- 25 October 1415: Henry V orders the killing of French prisoners after a raid on the English baggage train and a feared counter-attack. An estimated 2,000 or more prisoners are executed—an act controversial even by medieval standards.

- 25 October 1415: French casualties include approximately 6,000–8,000 dead, among them Constable Charles d'Albret, the Dukes of Alençon, Bar, and Brabant, and at least ninety great lords. English losses are estimated at 100–200. Charles, Duke of Orléans, is captured and will spend twenty-five years as a prisoner in England.

- 16 November 1415: Henry V boards a ship at Calais for England, accompanied by his most important prisoners.

- 23 November 1415: Henry enters London in triumph. Twenty thousand citizens greet him at Blackheath. The Agincourt Carol is composed to celebrate the victory.

- 21 May 1420: The Treaty of Troyes is signed. Henry V is recognized as heir to the French throne and regent of France, and marries Catherine of Valois, daughter of Charles VI.

- 31 August 1422: Henry V dies near Paris at the age of thirty-five, never having sat on the French throne. His infant son, Henry VI, inherits both crowns.