

Twilight

**4,500 Years Ago
The Middle Ages
August 19th**

1

Two large, black eyes opened silently. Limbs stretched and relaxed on its perch. Twilight jumped from the rocks. He landed with a soft splash of water from the river's trickles still flowing across the ground. He slowly galloped towards Henry's motionless body, lying in the white silk linen hammock, and nudged him, turning him over and nuzzling him.

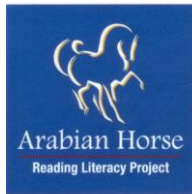
"Twilight," Henry muttered, blinking himself awake, and grabbing the Arabian's mane and hoisting himself on top of the creature. "It is time already?" he said groggily, the horse taking him off back to the campsite, and agreeing with a soft grunt.

The horse leaped across several gaps, leading downward to the river below, and they both received a brisk awakening as they galloped through a waterfall. The ends of it lead to the path towards the campsite, as they exited into light once again. The light shone in from the slits in between mounds of leaves suspended above them and branch limbs gnarled at an angle. Twilight was a black, male Arabian horse. He received his name from the white mark across his forehead and trailing down just in between his eyes. It was amazing how seemingly intimidating, but at the same time friendly this breed of horse appeared to be. Henry gripped the horse's mane tighter, and felt the damp hair entangle around his fingertips as they sank deeper into the mane for a better grip. His feet dangled on both sides of the horse's body, no saddle to support him. Although, Henry was never expected to be seen riding Twilight equipped with support. He was an excellent rider – another great talent that helped him get accepted into the military service – but in the battle to come, it was necessary to equip his horse with one. If not, this battle would not be easy.

Without warning, large gray tents began to appear from the bushes and rocks. There was a fire emitting from the site's centre, and soldiers were already on their feet. Arrays of horses were rallied around a small stream to the west of the campsite, still in range of sight. Their heads were gratefully dipping in and out, taking long-awaited mouthfuls.

"There, boy," Henry ordered politely into Twilight's ear, and the horse stopped after a few steps.

A man noticed Henry's arrival, and began walking across the site towards him. Henry swung a foot backward and onto the same side of the horse as his other foot. He climbed down off the horse's body, and stroked his side.



“Sir, the King requires your presence,” the soldier said approaching Henry.

“I’ll be right there,” Henry replied.

The soldier continued back the way he came, and Henry let Twilight attend the stream along with the other Arabians. Henry followed the soldier into a large maroon tent with a leather carpet to enter into its shelter. Henry looked inside, stepping upon the carpet. It was very dark. It would have been impossible to see if it weren’t for a few candles standing on pedestals set up around the room. The King turned to see Henry.

Henry opened his mouth to speak, but quickly bowed. He had almost forgotten how to approach his King.

“Henry, correct?” The King said. His voice was deep and harsh but he meant no harm.

“Yes, sir.” Henry said in response, maybe faster than the King could finish.

“I called you here, because something horrible has come to my attention. We are going into battle sooner than expected. The trainers won’t be able to ready everyone fast enough for tonight. This is why I’m appointing you as the head of this battle.”

Henry hesitated, quite shocked and at a total loss of words. “But, why me, sir?”

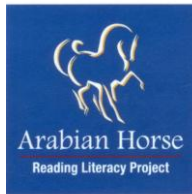
“You are an excellent rider and a great swordsman. I’ve observed you’re practices. My counselors and I are expecting the enemy to come tonight. We must be ready.”

2

Riding into battle, Twilight knew he would never get tired. He could run for countless days, and continue running the next. This gave Henry great courage towards this battle, and Twilight didn’t want to let him down. His hooves pounded against the earth, bits of dirt and tufts of grass tearing up from the ground. These two had a seemingly unbreakable bond. They would each die to protect each other. Twilight was a greater ally to Henry than any other soldier in the military. Some strange mystic essence was connected to them. They could feel what the other was feeling, and both were completely communicative. Like the horse could actually speak English, but not through words. It was a complicated process to explain, and not too many believed in this great partnership, but they didn’t have to. It showed in what they did.

Henry brandished his sword from the sheath attached to the horse’s body.

“Are you with me?” Henry cried to Twilight. Almost immediately, Henry could hear a faint whisper. *To the death*, Twilight thought.



The silver blade glinted in the sun's bright rays as they raced towards the opposing military. The enemy advanced quickly; or maybe it was them. It seemed as though they're armies were both riding at the same speeds, but it felt like an eternity. This could be their final moment of solitude, and then, seconds after, it could be their last. Death approached them faster than any blade could strike and faster than any arrow could pierce.

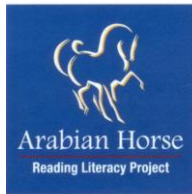
And then suddenly, and without warning, Henry could feel the cold steel hit him even before it actually did. The pronged spikes ejecting from a chain-link sphere grazed his helmet, creating two jagged scars across the cheek. This force of impact sent him off his balance, his fingers loosening on his sword's handle and his feet detached from the saddle's foothold stirrups. He fell backward, and his helmet slid off from his head as he landed crashing on one knee to the grass and earth. Henry's long brown hair unfurled from the shelter of his helmet as it fell to the ground. He could see more clearly, but his protection decreased. He craned his neck up to see a man dressed in familiar but opposing armor racing across the field towards him. The horse he was mounted upon was white and Henry could sense a sudden fear in the creature's eyes.

It doesn't want to fight, Henry thought, like producing the stallion's thoughts from its very being. Then his own thoughts returned to him, and he instinctively dived forward for his sword, just in between the attacker and him. Henry's gloved fingers tapped the blade, but his reach wasn't far enough to properly grasp it. He looked up, at two seemingly massive hooves inches from his face. Suddenly, the black Arabian horse he knew so well struck the stallion and the rider fell from his mount as did Henry. Twilight's hooves pushed up against the stallion's body as the horse toppled over onto the grass, moaning. It seemed as if they were rolling across the ground in a blur of hooves and black and white fur. Henry lied on his back in amazement of what was performed before him, and then scrambled to his feet, his sword now held firmly in his left hand.

Blinding shadows and figures raced across the field, dodging around him and some fell to their deathbeds where they lay. Twilight arose from the ground, bucking, and Henry looked to his left quick enough to see a shaggy, light brown wolf lunging at him. But this time Henry was ready, and he spun, narrowly missing the attack allowing the wolf to go through with its leap, and it hit the ground in a tumble and scramble. Henry glanced at his sword, where a deep red was now spattered across the blade like a bad paint job. The wolf rolled, revealing a gash under its left forearm. The swing of his arm had caught the beast.

Twilight dove over two battling opponents, landing on the ground past them and continuing across the field. Henry spun, and saw Twilight galloping blindly across the field.

"Twilight!" He cried. Twilight's eyes flickered and then looked at Henry, still riding. Henry hunched, his left shoulder slightly lower than his right, and the horse turned towards the direction of that shoulder as Henry turned, guiding Twilight in the right direction. As Twilight came near, Henry dove forward. He raised his left foot high; his left hand gripped the hair on the horse's shoulder. He swung his right foot up and over the horses' withers and his feet slipped back into their stirrups.



His sword raised above his head, Henry had just begun the battle alongside Twilight.

3

Suddenly, a horse appeared in the headlights of his vehicle. Benjamin Winters wasn't a bad guy; he paid his taxes, he bathed every day, and he had never smoked once in his life. He was dressed in a new nine-hundred dollar black suit, and his short hair was combed neatly to the side, kind of like Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible. Benjamin instinctively swung the wheel hard right and slammed on the breaks. But it wasn't in time. The SUV spun into the right lane where a slow-moving Pathfinder suddenly broadsided it with such force that it flipped the SUV up and over. It tumbled off the highway, barreling. A couple of final, metal-crunching flips sent the SUV's undercarriage crashing to a violent stop on top of a rickety wood beam-mounted guardrail. Steam billowed from the hood. Ben's eyes widened as he breathed in. His ribs contracted and he clutched his side. He heard something outside the vehicle. But when he looked, he could only see a blue sky through the shattered passenger window. Without warning, the horse's face was peering into his window. Smoke extracting from the creature's nostrils drifted into the window passing glass teeth still jutting from the window. It was Twilight.

Jared Stewart

