

Hospitaller is the epic tale of a knight persecuted at home. He receives a vision from an angel telling him to "take the cross." On pilgrimage, he meets knights, ladies, peasants, a king and a sultan and affects them all.

Hospitaller: A Tale Of The Unknown Knight In The Third Crusade

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3377.html?s=pdf>

Hospitaller:
A Tale of the Unknown Knight in the
Third Crusade



By Joseph Lessard

Copyright © 2008 Joseph Lessard

ISBN 978-1-60145-409-6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

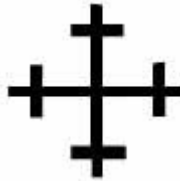
Printed in the United States of America.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Booklocker.com, Inc.
2008

Chapter One

The Unknown



“There be many created, but few shall be saved.”
II Esdras 8:3 the Apocrypha of the Old Testament
Published by the Press Syndicated of the University of
Cambridge England

“Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom,
and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this
too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom
comes much sorrow; the more the knowledge, the more
the grief.”
Ecclesiastes 1:17-18 New International Version
Zondervan Publishing House
Tenth Anniversary Edition, Copyright 1995

December 1188 C.E.

The cold mist hung thick and heavy in the air on a chilly winter morning in the English countryside. There was a heavy feeling in the

Joseph Lessard

lungs as one breathed in the damp frosty dew, then exhaled, making a column of smoke as the breath exited the mouth.

There was also a strong, pungent odor. It was the smell of manure emanating from the little village of sheep farms that permeated the outside air. The Unknown leaned out the window of his small, yet comfortable estate. He stretched and yawned as he greeted the early morning sunrise. A little hamlet of thatched roofed houses was what he owned; it sat just outside the window of his manor. The morning mist rose eerily from the rooftops, while gray smoke also emanated from the chimneys.

This was his village, left to him by his father when he had passed on to the other side just two years past. Yes, it was already two years. It did not seem that long; and now just yesterday, the Black Death had taken his mother away as well. It was God's punishment for Christendom's having lost Jerusalem to the infidels. Hmm...at least that is what the priest in the local church had been preaching to everyone.

Why did the church seem to think that every illness was a punishment sent by God? The Unknown thought deeply on this issue. His mother had committed no offense against anyone. That poor, dear sweet woman—a kinder more caring mother no son could have ever had—and yet the priest and the Mother Church said she died as a punishment for some far away sin? Some wrong committed by several others belonging to the Kingdom of God? This was a very hard and bitter idea for him to swallow. But to doubt God, to question His chastisements when he chooses to punish His children--this must not be done. No--it must never be done! This was the teaching of the Mother Church on the issue; and it would be a dangerous thing to question the priest and the church on the matter. If God had chosen death for one of His creatures, then so be it. Creator God is all knowing and wise. Who can question His reasons or motives?

But death, the permanence of that very word--no the finality! It stuns the mind into grief and madness. Death--it came so easy in this present time when life seemed but a feeble mist--a mere pant of air on the wind. One could love a fellow being and treasure them beyond

Hospitaller

words. Then the Black Death would come and take them away forever—in a matter of just a few short days. It seemed so unfair, so—ungodly to allow such a fate to befall an innocent being, a cherished one formed in the furnace of God’s creative powers.

Despite church dogma, the questions still plagued his mind. He was a knight, and an educated man. Church dogma is all right to push on the peasant masses, but a noble knight should be able to question things. A knight was a man of learning, as well as of warfare. He was a man who risked his life to protect Christian society, defend the innocent, and even the church itself. These facts should, and often did give him a certain amount of leeway when it came to church teaching. Suddenly, the door swung open and startled the Unknown from his inner thoughts.

“Oh, hello brother, I did not know you were up already. Shall I leave you, my lord?”

The Unknown’s sister was a beautiful woman. She had long blonde hair and pretty-blue eyes that seemed to sparkle with an inner glow. She was a kind woman, and always dressed appropriately for a noble lady. A girl of slender build, although that was partly due to the food shortage that always seemed to occur when the plague hung in the air.

“No, stay with me awhile, Juliana. I do not really care to be alone right now. I...well, I keep having these thoughts about our dear mother and father both having died from the plague. Do you ever question or think about what the church teaches about this? I just do not see where the sin is that they are supposed to have been punished for.”

Juliana went to the corner of the room and busied herself with mending clothes. He knew when she was sad, confused, or even depressed because she always kept her hands busy at such times. After their father had died, she hardly spoke at all, but she must have sewn an entire wardrobe fit for a queen.

“Why don’t you leave that to the servants, sister?”

Joseph Lessard

“Oh brother, don’t worry about me. I will be just fine, and you should not worry so much either; you will drive yourself mad trying to figure out spiritual matters. Wait until Father Gregory gets here; he will explain everything to you. It is not for us to understand the mind of God or to know His motives. That is why we have the clergy who are trained in such things. We have too many other responsibilities to worry about now, what with burying mother and running the estate. It’s a wonder you have time to think at all!”

The Unknown paused for a moment and stared at his sister. She was the only family he had left. Their father had wanted to have a second son after she was born; but that never came to pass. Divine providence seemed to keep their family line to one male heir per generation.

“You are probably right, Juliana. You always have kept a clearer mind than me. You got our father’s sense of practicality, and I got our mother’s constant questioning of things. I see things that are not right, and I always want to ask ‘Why?’ Sometimes it drives me to madness! I don’t see the logic in--or for that matter any compassion in some of the church’s teachings.”

“Talk to the Father when he gets here, my dear brother. He will clear all these things up for you. He has always had a patient disposition with all of your questioning. Many priests would not even take the time to clarify canon to the non-clergy. Father Gregory has always been most kind to you.”

“Perhaps you are right, Juliana. You always seem to know just what to say to calm my troubled thoughts. I wonder when the Father will get here.”

The Unknown looked out the window and saw a figure approaching from the distance, just on the rise. From the slight waddle in the person’s walk and the portly shape, he recognized that it was Father Gregory, coming to pay his respects.

Hospitaller

“Why is it, Juliana, that when everyone else is hungry in times of crisis, we always seem to have fat friars running about the countryside?”

The Unknown had a clever grin on his face as he made this remark; he liked jovial Father Gregory. Juliana chuckled under her breath at her brother’s comment, but quickly regained her composure.

“Oh brother, do not be so cruel. Father Gregory is a kind, godly man, and has been good to our family. Not all priests are as good and kind as he. I have even heard of some priests who are as mean and venomous as old tavern wenches are. We are lucky we have him.”

Father Gregory approached the house and knocked on the door. The unknown looked out the window and shouted loudly, “Good morning, Father! It is a blessed day to be alive in England! Would you not agree?”

Father Gregory jolted around, startled at the sudden voice coming at him. He was breathing heavily and sweating after his walk from the village church, over half a king’s mile down the road.

“Good heavens, boy! You put a fright in me! I almost gave up the ghost just now!”

The plump friar took out a cloth from his belt and began to wipe his brow. He took in a deep breath and returned the cloth from whence it came. He began to straighten his black woolen robe and dust himself off.

“Come in, Father. You are most welcome in my humble home. Would you care for something to eat—a bit of bread and some porridge, perhaps? Come in before you catch your death of cold.”

“God bless you and all who dwell herein, my son. May the Heavenly Father shine His face upon you, and all who belong to you.”

The Father looked toward the sky and kissed the cross he wore on a chain attached to a belt around his waist, and then he walked across the room, pulled up a chair, and sat at the table. Juliana brought him

Joseph Lessard

some food, and he began to eat. She spoke to him after he blessed his food and made the sign of the cross over his chest.

“Thank you for coming so soon after Mother’s passing, Father.”

“Hmm... Yes, my daughter, I was so saddened when I heard the news.”

“God has called her home, Father. She no longer suffers; she merely sleeps until the time of the resurrection--and the Day of Judgment.”

Father Gregory paused for a moment and sighed. He looked up at Juliana, after taking a bite of his food. He mumbled his words nervously while he chewed.

“I am afraid I have some more bad news, Juliana. The bishop--that is the church— has not given me permission to perform a Christian burial on your poor mother. Also, she is not to be buried on holy ground in the churchyard. I am so sorry, Juliana. I cannot go against the will of my superiors and the Holy Mother Church.”

Father Gregory dipped the brown bread into the porridge and took another nervous bite.

Juliana was overcome by her emotions, and she began to weep. Suddenly, she threw a wooden bowl on the floor; then she pushed her way past the Father and shouted back at him.

“Damn your superiors, Father! She was a good and kindly God-fearing woman, and you know it! She deserves a Christian burial! Why? Why, Father? Is it because my father did not lend his sword to the church’s war against the Mohammedans? Is it because he did not go and fight your cursed war the way my grandfather did?”

Juliana ran to her room in tears. The Unknown stared, stunned, at the Father. He was growing weary of what seemed to be the church’s persecution of his family. It was persecution that the church had little basis for. After all, many knights did not take the cross. Someone needed to stay behind and maintain order.

Hospitaller

“You handled that well, Father. What other bit of cheerful news have you brought to make my humble home a more joyous place today? What--with my mother’s body in the other room barely cold—and the church already condemns her for all eternity? The same way you did my father! What happy news! What a holy blessed day in England! Ring the church bells! Sing songs of praise! The church has condemned another heathenish sinner! Why, I suppose you will say ‘God wills it!’ What an arse am I to invite you in, Father! And you--I should have known, a good friend to my family, and yet a faithful pawn of The Holy Mother Church! Does it make you feel any better to have the power to bless or curse a soul for all eternity? Where is the love of Christ now, Father? What of mercy and grace--where are they, Father? There is the door! You best be on your way--*old friend!*”

“I—I—I am sorry, son. It is the will of the church. I can only obey and do what I am told to do. One day you will understand; we are all just pawns in this business of life and salvation. We must all simply play our part and do as we are told. However, I have also come to offer an indulgence for your dear mother and father. I went over the bishop’s head. I begged my superiors on your parent’s behalf. They offered this one chance for you to save their souls from eternal damnation.”

“Hmm...I see, Father, and what must I do to gain them this indulgence?”

“Believe me son; I am only looking out for your family’s interests. You have always been friends of mine since our boyhood in the village. You may curse me when I tell you this, but it is the only way. You must take up the cross and go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Saladin, as you know, has taken back Jerusalem. Even now, he besieges Tyre. The Holy Father has called for all the able-bodied men in Christendom to take up the cross. He has offered very liberal indulgences to all men who go. So you see--there is a way for you to save your mother and father from hell's eternal flames, my son.”

The Unknown sat in silence for a moment, scratching his chin and pulling on his neatly trimmed sandy-blond beard. He knew this idea was as good as a death sentence. Few able-bodied men had returned

Joseph Lessard

from the long journey, or from the fierce combat with the vile Mohammedans. Many had also died from disease on the way.

“Do you remember when I was a boy and my grandfather came back from the east after serving in the Holy Land, Father?”

“Yes, I remember it well.”

“We would sit by the fire at night as he coughed and wheezed. He would tell me stories of that far off land--the land of milk and honey, the land of gold and exotic women. It was a place where a poor simple farmer from England could live like a king. You know, Father, I often dreamt of going there when I was young. That was until I watched my grandfather waste away and die of some strange illness he contracted in that far-off place.”

“Yes, I remember him when I too was young. He was a strong, proud knight.”

The Unknown seemed to glow with pride and straighten up as he spoke of his grandfather.

“Oh yes, indeed he was, Father. He was one who served with Tancred near Antioch. He was so young then. It was said of both of them that they would charge at vast numbers of Mohammedans while screaming at the top of their lungs. Although outnumbered, they terrified the Moslems, so much so that they called them 'little jinn' and refused to fight them when they came near. The Moslems would just break ranks and run before them like frightened sheep before a wolf.”

“So why didn't your father take the cross as well when told to do so by the baron?”

The Unknown paused again for a moment and looked out the window.

“Did you know, Father, that every day he also sat here and watched my proud grandfather waste away to nothing, as I did? My grandfather, who was drooling on himself like an animal, that proud knight who could cleave a man in two by swinging his sword with one hand; do you know how that tortured my father? That is why he

Hospitaller

decided that he would not go. He decided to put his family first and stay here in England. The baron's lands still needed protecting here as well. Not all knights could, or should take the cross."

Father Gregory looked sadly at the Unknown. He wanted to console him.

"All our decisions, whether they seem right to us or not, have a consequence. Whether we like it or not, everything we do in this world affects others, and not just our own family. We all must make sacrifices for the good of our society. Otherwise we would all be lost."

The Unknown thought meditatively as he looked at Father Gregory, then asked,

"And what sacrifice have you made, Father? Would you leave home and family? Would you go to some far-off land to make war on a strange people? Would you join the warrior monks and kill men you do not even know? It is an easy thing to talk about, but to end a man's life; it is a very difficult thing. Why should I fight simply for a belief, Father—for a religion? And what is religion? Can you hold it in your hand? Can you own it as a piece of gold or silver and put it on a shelf? Will it put bread in your stomach? Will it clothe your family? You ask much, Father, for me to make a long, dangerous journey and fight a ferocious foe for my religion--for God and my people. It is a very, very difficult thing to do."

"Yes, I see your point, my son. Nevertheless, things are as they are. You have the church's offer. If you take up the cross, we will protect your land and property while you are gone, and your parents will be waiting for you in heaven. The church will also move their remains to sacred church land. That is the church's offer. You have three days to respond. That is the best I can do."

The Unknown looked out his window and saw a rider on horseback approaching. The man galloped in a proud and regal manner on his steed. Right away, he knew that it was Baldwin, dressed in his armor. He thought to himself, "The baron's son is sure up early; and he's been coming around here a lot lately. What could he want now?"

Joseph Lessard

Baldwin dismounted from his horse and came and knocked on the door.

“Come in, my friend; the Father was just leaving, were you not, Father?”

“Oh yes, of course. I have other rounds to make. I must be about the Lord’s work, you know.”

“Yes indeed, Father, you must go. I will give some thought to what you have advised, but I cannot say I will do as the church wants on the matter.”

Baldwin looked at the Father and nodded.

“Good day to you, Father.”

“Yes, quite. Good day, all.”

Father Gregory left the room. Suddenly, there was a tense feeling in the air as Baldwin and the Unknown looked at each other. It was obvious that these two men were not the best of friends. They had played together in the village as boys, and had had a small feud going with each other from those days long ago. But recently--or so it seemed since his father’s death two years ago—there had been much more tension between their families. The baron was pressuring him to sell his land and move on. It appeared that since his father had refused to go fight in The Holy Land that they had lost favor with the baron who had gone there.

“My friend, is Juliana around?”

“Yes, she is in her room. You have been coming to see her a lot lately. May I ask what your intentions are toward my sister?”

“You may ask, but I might not tell you--then again, why not? I was sorry to hear of your mother’s death. I have come to see your sister and to offer my father’s—the baron’s—condolences.”

“My mother’s fate is no concern of yours, Sir Baldwin; but tell your father that I thank him anyway for his condolences. And where is your father? Could he not come here to offer them himself?”

Hospitaller

Baldwin glared at the Unknown. He despised this unworthy knight of low rank.

“I am afraid he too is ill. He is getting older and with this terrible plague about—well, I just hope he does not have it too. It would be very distressful for me if he were to pass on now. So many things are going on these days, what with King Henry raising an army to recapture Jerusalem from the Saracens. I still need Father around, with all his knowledge.”

“Yes, I am sure it would be terrible for you if he were to pass on now, Sir Baldwin.”

The Unknown looked at Baldwin and saw very little sorrow for his father in his eyes. He thought, *He probably cannot wait for the old buzzard to die so he can take over his lands.* “There is something else you are not telling me, Baldwin. There is something more than my mother’s death and your visit to my sister on your mind. Come, come my friend, your demeanor betrays you. What else are you after, sir?”

Baldwin was a tall knight, about six feet; he had dark hair and a closely trimmed black beard. He was muscular, with hazel eyes. Hard military training had given him a strong physique. He wore a blue tunic over his chain mail. Emblazoned on it was the head-on view of a black eagle.

“I guess it is time to tell you. Honesty should always be maintained among knights. My father wants your land. He believes your father has disgraced our people by not taking the cross, as he—your father’s liege lord—did. His early death, and your mother’s just two years later are a sure sign of disfavor before God. Let us face facts. You have spent so much time caring for your sick mother that you are operating at a loss here. I know that you were barely able to raise the money for the king’s tax to pay his army to retake Jerusalem. And good King Henry will be by again in just a few short months for more Saladin tithes. He is raising a large army to retake Jerusalem from the Mohammedans, as you know. Can you pay another tithe like the last one?”

The Unknown stared at Baldwin and felt rage seething just below the surface. He could hardly contain his emotions. This peacock--what a pompous arrogant arse he is!

The Unknown suddenly blurted out,

“I will fulfill my obligations without any help from you or your father, Sir Knight! You know my father always served the baron well here in England. He always came when his liege lord called on knights to defend the fiefdom. He was no coward! Now, come, come, what is your interest in my sister?”

Baldwin snapped back at the Unknown, raising his voice to just below a shout,

“You are teetering on losing your land and you and Juliana will be out on the street. I do not want to see that happen to your sister. Despite what you think of me, I love her! We have been seeing each other in secret for some time now. Oh yes, I knew you would not approve. She agreed with me on that. Think, man, I am offering you a way out! I want to marry Juliana; but with your father dead we need your permission for the church to bless the marriage.”

“So now you use my sister against me, Baldwin? Why do you not slither back out the door?”

“You cannot keep her here forever! What, will you have her care for you until she is an old maid? What kind of a life would that be for her? She would never know the joy of raising children. Besides, you may not be here that long, as it is. My father will soon buy you out of this land anyway and return the property to our estate.”

“By all that is sacred and holy, I will be dead and in my grave before I give this land back to you or your father! As long as I live, not one iota of this soil shall belong to you—or to him! My father would turn over in his grave if that were ever to happen!”

“Think, man! Do you want to be forcibly expelled from this place? Think of the shame to your sister! Believe me when I tell you, I could

Hospitaller

care less what happens to you, but for the sake of Juliana, I am going to offer you a way out. I do not want her to live like a peasant.”

Baldwin scowled at the Unknown. The Unknown glared back at him and said,

“Oh, are there not so many charitable people running about this part of England today? Why, a poor man should live like a king with all this charity about. What gracious and generous offer does the baron have for a poor knight such as me? I tell you now, Baldwin, you be warned--for all the knights in Christendom, or even Saladin and his Saracens—they could not tear this land from my family name! My father is now part of this soil, and soon my mother will be too.”

Baldwin rested his hand on the pommel of his sword, which hung from the belt around his waist. He took in a deep breath and sighed as he stared at this complex knight standing before him. He started to grasp the pommel of his sword; then he opened his hand and tapped his forefinger on it instead.

“By God and all his holy angels, if it were not for your sister, I would run you through with my own sword! Do not be so selfish. As a Christian, you should think of someone besides yourself for a change. Think of Juliana! Think of your dear mother and father, buried—or soon to be—here on the grounds rather than on sacred church land. For the sake of others, I make you this offer. I will only make it once, and then you will be driven from this land by force. If I come back again without your answer, it will be at the head of fifty armed knights. Bless the union of Juliana and me, and you may keep this estate. You will also receive a reward from the baron’s treasury to help you pay the king’s tithe that is soon to come again. We will give up forever any designs on your land and you may live in peace. However, you will still serve me as your liege lord. You must come to me when called to defend your baron’s lands. Are these terms acceptable to you? I will give you only one day to answer. I suggest you use it wisely.”

The Unknown sat in a chair at the table where Father Gregory’s porridge sat cold. He looked at the cold porridge and felt icy, gray, and

lifeless, just like the porridge. How had his grandfather's good name come to this? What a glorious, excellent knight he had been; he had bravely charged the Mohammedans with Sir Tancred at Antioch. He had cut down so many of the infidels. What sort of reward was this now? Where is God in all of this? For the supposed shame of his son to befall his grandson now--what a twist of fate this is. That honorable knight must be turning in his grave at this outcome. The Unknown felt lonely and isolated: Oh, to suffer the insults, jibes, and hatred of his enemies in this world all alone. What a horrible fate! Why had God laid such an awful burden on him in this life?

“Do I have your answer, sir knight? Or shall I return tomorrow?”

The Unknown regained his thoughts and replied, “Tell me, Sir Baldwin, what sort of Christian are you? Are you a selfish one? Or one who is truly concerned for his fellow knights and Christians? Come back tomorrow and I will have an answer for you.”

“The right one, I hope; for it would be a shame to kill so excellent a warrior. There is no honor in taking the life of a fellow soldier of the cross. May I speak with Juliana now?”

“You have my leave, Sir Baldwin.”

Baldwin stared arrogantly at the knight before him. He felt superior to this lesser knight. He felt totally in control of his world. Soon his father would be dead, and he would rule the Barony. He would expand it and recover many smaller lands such as this knight's land. Baldwin's great-grandfather had given it to this knight's great-grandfather for services rendered in some long-forgotten battle under William the Conqueror. Now it was time to take back the land that had belonged to his family line and to rid himself of this quarrelsome soldier for good.

However, there was still Juliana. She was so beautiful, and really complicated the picture. Baldwin felt smitten by this woman. She infatuated him enough that he would even give up his claim to her brother's land in order to make her his wife, or at least give up the claim for a while. Perhaps he could still reclaim the land at a later time.

Hospitaller

There must be an obscure way to be rid of one lone knight. Maybe he could send him alone on a mission to collect overdue taxes, and then set an ambush for him. Maybe that was the way to dispose of him without raising Juliana's suspicions. Let her think that a mob of disgruntled peasants had killed him.

Juliana had stood in her room by the door with it ajar so she could hear her brother and her love speak. She was a faithful sister to her brother, and she would die by his side if the need arose, but the thought of living in the baron's castle with all its servants attracted her. To be a noble lady of high stature and to entertain possibly even the king of England, what a grand lifestyle that would be. She hoped her brother could come to terms with her love, and that the two of them would learn to get along. She would do her duty, though, and only marry if they obtained her brother's blessing. That was the proper Christian way. And she would not violate the laws of her faith.

"Juliana, my love, how have you been? I was so sorry to hear of your dear mother's passing. She was a sweet lady."

Baldwin approached Juliana; he took her hand and kissed it. He took her other hand and kissed it too. To kiss two hands was a very forward display of affection and intent. Baldwin was also a knight of strict training and of great physical strength. His pretty young lady looked tiny and frail in comparison, as he fawned on her, but she had such power over him. He was so smitten by her loveliness that he found it easy to lose his chain of thought while he doted over her. He dared not kiss her on the lips, as he truly wished to do. Chivalry did not allow one to treat a lady so. He would have to wait until they were married. Two kisses on the hands was already a very forward statement of his desire.

"Oh, my dear Baldwin, we knew that this day would be here soon with mother. She is better off now, rather than having to suffer that horrible illness. At least she is asleep until the Savior comes. I believe I will see her in heaven one day, despite what the church says."

Joseph Lessard

Baldwin paused for a moment and thought about what the church had decreed...

“What the Holy Mother Church says is the law. I am sorry, but I am afraid your mother will go where the church says she will go. That is unless an indulgence can be bought for her. If you tell your brother to bless our union, I could buy such an indulgence for your mother and father, or I could at least find some way to influence the church in their favor. Talk some sense into your brother, Juliana. You are the only one he really listens to!”

Juliana crossed her arms and gave Baldwin a stern look from her blue eyes.

“Maybe that’s because I am the only one who does not seem to want something from him— other than his love. I am the only one who does not seem to want to hurt him. My brother is a lonely man, my dear Baldwin. He is a faithful Christian. He was so close to grandfather, but he died a miserable death after serving the church. When father refused to suffer the same fate, the church tossed him aside like refuse. Now it wants him to go and fight their battles in some faraway land where grandfather caught his fate. What more can be asked of him, Baldwin? Everyone tears at him—the Baron, you, the church. When will it end? When he too is dead? And when that doom befalls him; when he lies down upon the earth for the last time and his body turns to dust, and all his weapons melt away and become rust, will the church reward him? Or will the church in all its piety punish him as it did his father?”

“You ask too many questions, Juliana. You are becoming like your brother— thinking too much. All I know is that I love you, and I wish for us to marry. I do not want you to be concerned about your brother, so talk to him. Make him understand. If he blesses our wedding, things will be so much easier for him. He can keep his land. Maybe he could even find a wife— a good Christian woman to share his land and good fortune with him. I do not want to see your brother harmed. You must talk some sense into him, Juliana.”

Juliana turned away from Baldwin and sighed.

Hospitaller

“I will see what I can do. It may take some time, though.”

“I gave him until tomorrow. That is the best that I could do. My father, the baron, wants this matter closed.”

“Hmm...we must not keep the baron in suspense, must we? Go now. I will see you on the morrow.”

“Good day, my dear Juliana. I cannot wait until the day we are together forever.”

Baldwin took Juliana’s slight hand in his much larger one and kissed it again.

”Nor can I, my dear Baldwin. But try to understand my brother. He is a good man.”

Baldwin half nodded at this, and with that turned and left the room.

He walked past the Unknown One with barely a glance. He strutted out of the house, mounted his steed, and galloped off over the rise.

The Unknown sat in the darkened house, deep in his thoughts. He felt so very much alone now. He thought to himself; *oh God, I am surrounded by enemies! Will even you abandon me; and shall I go down to my grave alone? What an awful mess and burden this life has become. What a rotten fate to befall a faithful Christian servant of God.*

Juliana came out to talk to her brother again. She really began to pity him. He was sitting there so sullen-looking. It was as if he carried the weight of the world upon himself.

“I--I was going to tell you soon, but I was afraid of how you might react.”

The Unknown slowly snapped from his trance and turned to look at his sister.

“You know how I feel about him, Juliana. Or more importantly, that he hates me. Ever since we were small boys playing in the countryside together and he had that accident; he has never forgiven me.”

Joseph Lessard

“That accident, brother--you pushed him down a hill and he broke his leg and shoulder. He was in bed for two months, caught a disease of the lung, and he almost died!”

“I was only playing, Juliana. I was ten or eleven; I did not know how badly he would get hurt. Are you going to join the others and judge me now, too, for something, I did as an innocent boy? Are you going to side with him and his father? Where is your family loyalty, sister?”

Juliana walked over and sat at the table next to her brother. She reached out and put her arm on his shoulder and looked into his eyes.

“I am not siding with anyone, my dear brother. Things do not have to be so difficult. I did not tell you I was seeing Baldwin because I knew you would be upset. We are all adults now and must learn to get along. There is hope, brother. Baldwin has offered to let you keep the estate and to give you some money to help get it back in business. All you have to do is bless our marriage in the church. It is not much to ask. We love each other! Is not forgiveness a Christian trait? Is not love?”

The Unknown sat silently for a moment, and then answered his sister.

“Forgiveness, forgiveness,--yes, it is. But, who needs to forgive whom, that is the question. Let me be alone for a while, Juliana. I need some time to think through this day. We must also bury Mother here on the estate with Father. I will say some words in place of the priest. We can at least try to give her a Christian burial ourselves.”

Juliana paused and smiled at her brother. He was capable of so many good works, and yet he was so troubled in his spirit. He was a good man, yet like so many other good men, troubles seemed to find him.

“Cheer up, things will soon be better. I know they will. Mother would not have wanted you to worry so much. You will only cause yourself to become ill.”

Hospitaller

Juliana smiled at her brother, and kissed him on the forehead, and then she turned and went to her room. She paused for just a moment and looked back over her shoulder at her brother. Yes, indeed he was a good man; but worried from so many responsibilities. She pitied him; and she prayed for him.

Later that day, they and the servants buried their mother next to their father, near a tree down by the stream on the estate. The Unknown quoted a few words from scripture.

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace (Numbers 6:24-26).”

The Unknown took a handful of frozen dirt and sprinkled it into the grave. His sister followed him, doing the same. Then some of the servants began to fill in the grave.

Juliana was weeping, and the Unknown was barely able to hold back his own tears. He comforted his sister, and then one of the servants took her by the arm and slowly brought her back up to the manor.

The Unknown stood in silence and thought to himself, *Oh this wretched, bitter, horrible life! Trial heaped upon trial, and hardly an end in sight! What profit, oh God, in heaven is there in being a Christian? Why must I suffer innumerable woes in order to gain some future unseen reward in the kingdom of heaven? What kind of great cosmic plan is this? To live an unhappy existence, full of ironies and insults, in this abode of wicked men and fallen angels, truly, this is a mockery of eternal justice! I want no more of this weary, dreary, withering, grinding down life!*

He closed his eyes very tightly now, and continued in his thoughts.

How easy for you, oh God, oh Unseen One, Ruler of Heaven; to sit high on your throne and throw down your judgments on the world of simple men. Why, Lord, are you so far away? Please, come down here to me from on high and answer me! Explain to me your great master

Joseph Lessard

plan! If you are God, you can answer me, for you can do all things. Where is your great mercy, Lord? Why do the wicked rule the day at the expense of the good man? When will you reward your faithful suffering servants? I call upon you, if you are so high and mighty, if you can do all things, then come—come down here and explain my horrible destiny to me! Or are you just an invention of men's minds? Perhaps that is all you are.

The Unknown sat quietly in silence and contemplation.

And across the channel, Richard Plantagenet of Poitou, the future King of England, begged forgiveness of his many grievous sins at the church in Poitou and made plans to seize his father's throne. He also made plans for war in the region of Palestine. He planned to be the one remembered for all time for retaking the Holy City of God.

Hospitaller

*“Woe to Christendom! Jerusalem hath fallen. The cross
is lost and the host of the cross is slain.”*

*The Crusades: Iron men and Saints and the Flame of
Islam by Harold Lamb*

Copyright, 1930, 1931

Chapter Three

“The Righteousness of the Faith”



“Oh prophet! Stir up the faithful to fight. Twenty of you who stand firm shall vanquish two hundred: and if there be an hundred of you they shall vanquish a thousand of the infidels, for they are a people devoid of understanding.” (Koran Sura 8:35)

“Verily, they who believe (Muslims), and they who follow the Jewish religion, and the Christians, and the Sabeites – whoever of these believeth in Allah and the last day, and doeth that which is right, shall have their reward with their lord: fear shall not come upon them, neither shall they be grieved.” (Koran Sura 2:59)

Verily, the infidels are your undoubted enemies! (Koran Sura 4:21)

Hospitaller

September 30, 1187 C.E.

Salah al-Din Yusuf bin Auyub sat in his dimly lit tent just outside the walls of Jerusalem. It was evening and a cool southeasterly breeze was blowing into the open tent flaps. As a sign from Allah, it blew in from the direction of Mecca. He stepped outside the tent to see a reddish-orange sun melting into the skyline of the holy city of Jerusalem. Blue, red, and orange streamers of clouds painted the dimly lit middle-eastern horizon.

This was truly a great day to be a Muslim and a follower of the true faith. Indeed, Allah is great, and had proven so with the defeat of the infidel army at Lake Tiberius, and here at Jerusalem as well.

Saladin laid down his prayer mat. For the first time in eighty-eight years, since the iron men had come, the call to prayer echoed out from the holy city of Jerusalem.

It was a beautifully haunting sound, echoing out from the city.

Allah u Akbar, Allah u Akbar...

Allah is great, Allah is great...

Ash-hadu al-la llaha ill Allah – Ash-hadu al-la llaha ill Allah.

I bear witness that there is no divinity but Allah.

Ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasulullaah.

I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's messenger.

The Muezzin went on with his call to prayer; then Saladin knelt down on his prayer mat, facing toward Mecca. He held his hands out with the palms up and began to recite the obligatory Salat—the Muslim prayers. He also recited some pages of the Holy Koran. After bowing in prayer, he stood up to return to his tent. There was still much excitement in the air. Allah had proven to be greater than the god of the Christians was. Every Muslim knew--both Sunni and Shia—that the Christian god was not the same god as the all-supreme Allah. As was written in the Holy Koran, “Praise be to Allah who hath not begotten a

Joseph Lessard

son, who hath no partner in the Kingdom, nor any protector on account of weakness.” (Sura 17:110)

Saladin was a devout Sunni Muslim. He had studied in one of the leading madras's in Damascus, and he could recite much of the Holy Koran. Even so, he was still curious. *What drove these Franks, these Latin Christians, to make such a long hazardous journey to this holy place? What sort of faith would drive these people to endure starvation, hardships, sword, plague, and drought, to come to this foreign land, this strange faith of theirs, this belief in Jesus son of Mary as a son of God, why it rivaled the passion of many of the devout of Islam!* Saladin pondered these things as he prepared to rest from the long day.

In a way, he admired the devout faith of many of the Christians. They were not all chivalrous, as he had been to them, but many were. Many, such as Balian d' Ibelin, the Christian defender of Jerusalem, had been an honorable man.

He had captured Balian at Tiberius, but had let him go for a ransom and the promise not to take up arms against Muslims again. However, after Hattin, the city of Jerusalem had scarcely a knight left to defend it. The people begged Balian to fight and lead them, so Balian had come to Saladin, explained to him the situation, and asked to be absolved of his vow. Saladin was so impressed by his honor that he excused him from the vow. If only all Muslims and Christians could be so honorable, then they could share this holy place in peace and brotherhood.

But what of the curses brought down on the infidels by the Holy Koran? Saladin thought, *Perhaps these excellent knights could slowly be converted to the true faith. Then they too could share in the rewards of paradise, for truly Allah is compassionate and merciful.*

“Al Nasir! Al Nasir! Allah u Akbar!”

Mamluk, Abbasid, and Atabeg horsemen galloped by Saladin's tent, yelling out this phrase. It meant "the victor." After he defeated the army of King Guy of Jerusalem at Lake Tiberius, the men began to call him Al Nasir. Saladin stared out at the spectacle of the horsemen. They

kicked up a cloud of brownish-orange dust that seemed to glow eerily in the waning sunlight as they trotted back and forth. He stared into it, and paused in thought. He felt he must be careful. He did not want men to hold him in as high esteem as they did the prophet—peace be upon him. Worship of a mere mortal could be a dangerous thing. He tried to remain humble; and he gave away almost his entire share of the booty to the poor. Indeed, Zakat—obligatory alms—helped the soul feel purified.

The Advisor thought this act foolish. To give too much was to waste ones resources.

Saladin turned and entered his tent.

“May the blessings of the prophet—peace be upon him—illuminate your path, Al Nasir.”

“May they also come to rest on your house, my friend, Sarim.”

“The men worship you, Saladin. You must use this adoration and move on. Finish the conquest of the infidels. Kill them all and purge our blessed land of their stench, for jihad is our way, my great Sultan Saladin!”

Saladin looked at Sarim al-Din and pondered his statement. He scratched his chin in thought for a moment, and then responded.

“Why do so many of my fellow Muslims only thirst for blood? Do you think that jihad, war, and the killing of infidels are the only way to paradise? Is Allah not also a compassionate and merciful god? We may be able to convert these Franks to the true faith. With proper instruction and guidance, they could become like us. There are many honorable and valiant men amongst them. We should make them our allies and further the cause of Islam. Imagine Frank, Arab, and Turkmen fighting together for the cause of Allah. Just think of it, Sarim! We could conquer the entire world for Allah! Do not always think so small, my friend, and do not always merely react to what is right in front of you. Is it not our goal to spread Islam over the entire world? We can complete this task by using peaceful means as well as war, my friend.

Tame your emotions and open your mind, Sarim. Look beyond the here and now. Look past your hate, or it may end up destroying you. Hate is the enemy of a long life.”

Sarim was shorter and stockier than Saladin was. He had come from the Anatolia region of Turkey, where the Mamluks resided. He was fairer skinned, with hazel eyes. He had started in his youth as a slave, perhaps captured from Byzantium, and later entered the army as a foot soldier. After performing well in many battles, Sarim had risen all the way to the rank of general. Rumor had it that his parents had been Christians. He was a trusted, hard fighting commander in Saladin’s army, but he had reached the ceiling of his career due to worries about his background. Saladin had come to rely on and trust Sarim. However, many other emirs and commanders were wary, perhaps even afraid of him. They often spread disparaging rumors about his background, even questioning his faith.

Sarim al-Din scoured; he loathed the Franks. They had also wounded him ten years prior, at the battle of Montgisard, nearly putting out an eye. Therefore, he also had a physical scar to remind him of his hatred of the Franks. Sarim responded from his deeply felt emotions.

“Never, oh great Saladin, may Allah burn my bones to ashes before I commune with the infidels! Truly, they are a hideous and vile race of men! O Saladin, you have always been a man of reason and compassion, but compassion should only be used on your fellow Muslims. Do not waste it on the heathens. Does it not say in Sura 33, ‘Verily, Allah hath cursed the infidels, and hath got ready for them the flame’?”

Saladin walked calmly around his candle-lit tent. The light flickered with every breeze, causing the shadows to dance around against the cloth walls. He mused over his friend and fellow general’s statement as he stared into the flame of one of the candles.

Saladin was a man of tall stature. He had dark hair, copper skin, and a closely trimmed mustache. He wore tall brown boots, and a brown kilt with gold-colored Arabic decorations on it. He had on a

Hospitaller

brown undershirt, also with gold-colored decorations in the Muslim style on it, a dark reddish colored over-vest with verses from the Holy Koran in gold lettering on the sleeves, a chain mail head covering with a gold-colored cylindrical helmet on top, and a white cloth over the top of this. On his waist hung a long straight double-edged sword, similar to those that the cross bearers used. He was a commanding figure on the battlefield. He did not fight often himself, but his mere presence on the field and in command inspired his warriors.

It was said that when a warrior showed cowardice on the battlefield, Saladin could break him down with his fierce stare. His dark, piercing eyes could stare a man into shame, causing him to return quickly to the fight. But Saladin could also be a compassionate man. He looked at Sarim—a shorter, more portly man who dressed in the Mamluk style, and who had a curved single-edged sword hanging from his waist.

“O Sarim, how can you hate the Christians? Were your parents not Christians? Did Allah not create them as well as us, and the Hindus and Buddhists too? Why should we be so favored that only we share in the true faith that leads to paradise? No. I think it is our duty to offer them a chance to share in the true faith. We are all just stuck here in this temporary place of torment. All any of us want is a chance to obtain paradise, my friend.”

Sarim looked angry. Many believed that he attacked the Christians so fiercely in order to prove that he had never been one of them. He was brutal on the battlefield, covered in blood and with eyes on fire with rage. Sarim had developed a reputation as a man who fought like a jinn. Even fellow Muslim warriors were afraid of him during a battle. They kept a safe distance out of fear of being mistaken for a Christian soldier, and of being hacked to pieces. All feared him and his Mamluk band of five hundred.

“I do not remember my parents,” Sarim blurted out. “I was taken from my village as a small boy by the Mamluks. And I do not believe my parents were Christians either. That is a lie spread by my enemies in order to keep me from further promotion.”

Joseph Lessard

Sarim looked hurt and frustrated. He worshipped Saladin, and sought after his approval. “You do not believe it, do you, my Sultan?”

Saladin looked at his friend again, and felt a twinge of pity for him. He relied on this man to command the fast, hard-hitting Mamluk cavalry on his right wing. They had saved Saladin from total defeat twice in Egypt. Many of them had paid for this with their lives. Indeed, Saladin owed much to this man and his Mamluk warriors. They even acted as his personal bodyguard.

“Sarim, what does it matter where you started from? It is how you live and finish your life that counts in paradise. You are a most revered Muslim warrior. You are a holy man on the path of jihad. Live your life like a good Muslim. Give alms and make the hajj to Mecca. If you fill your life and mind with hate, that hate will only destroy you. I do not want to see that happen to my friend.”

Saladin put his hand on Sarim’s shoulder and gave it a friendly grasp.

Suddenly, a voice from the open tent flap broke into the conversation.

“Excuse me, uncle. May I interrupt and ask a favor of you?”

“Taqi, my good nephew, come in--come in. Please, sit down. What can I do for my brother’s son?”

Taqi was the young seventeen-year-old son of Saladin’s brother. He was a tall, thin, dark-haired and dark-skinned ayyubid youth. He was eager for war and had fought well at Lake Tiberius, as well as at the just concluded siege of Jerusalem. His youthful enthusiasm had cheered Saladin up on a couple of occasions when it seemed the battle was in doubt. Taqi had charged furiously at the Franks with about two hundred men. He had turned the tide on one of the flanks in a major conflict.

“Taqi, you look worried. Go ahead, ask anything, and I shall do my best to deliver it.”

Taqi nervously approached his older and wiser relative.

Hospitaller

“My--My Sultan, here is my share of the booty. I wish to buy freedom for two hundred of the poorer Christians so that they will not be sold in the slave markets of Damascus.”

Saladin tilted his head back, put a finger over his mouth as though mulling over a deep thought, and after what seemed forever to Taqi, he responded.

“You know, nephew, what the Koran teaches on this in Sura 47? Those of the infidels who are captured in battle and who do not accept Islam are to be beheaded or sold into slavery. That is why I beheaded hundreds of Franks, both Templars and Hospitallers, at Lake Tiberius. They refused to accept the true faith. They died bravely, without making a sound, just like true jihadists. They earned my respect in their defeat that day. I could not see such brave men sold into slavery just because their leaders led them into a defeat. They deserved a noble warrior’s death, and I saw to it that they received one.”

Taqi continued to plead with Saladin, appearing a bit disturbed.

“Uncle, I have seen many of these pale-skinned women raped, deflowered like harlots by Mamluk, Seljuq, and Atabeg warriors. Some were noble women and some were mere peasant girls. I can still hear their pitiful screams echoing in my mind. I cannot bear to see this happen. I cannot believe that this is the will of Allah.”

Taqi was breathing heavily and perspiring. He was truly upset by the spectacle he had seen. Many in the Muslim ranks did not see the Franks as humans, but as animals. Once conquered, they were there only for the pleasure of the conquerors. Taqi was still a young man and dreamt only of the glory of hard-fought battles, not the atrocities of war perpetrated by the victors on those of the losing side.

Saladin put his hand on Taqi’s shoulder and looked him in the eyes.

“Do not fret, I understand, Taqi. I have seen what you have seen; and I found it disturbing as well. I have also used my share of the booty

Joseph Lessard

to buy freedom for many of the infidels who could not pay the toll to leave Jerusalem. Go now, and free your Christians.”

Sarim interrupted with a furious outburst. His face had reddened with anger.

“Why, my Sultan, do you use the spoils of conquest to free the conquered? Will Allah smile on this action? Does not the Holy Koran say to strike off the heads of the infidels? Do you not fear violating the Holy Koran itself?”

Saladin thrust out a hand and held it toward Sarim to silence him.

“Sarim, hold your anger, my friend. Does the Koran also not say that Allah is the compassionate and merciful one? So, to be like Allah, should we also not show compassion and mercy?”

Sarim grumbled quietly and sat down in a corner with a scowl on his face. He was a victor in battle, but his arguments had been defeated by his Sultan, Saladin.

Taqi began to leave the tent excitedly, and then paused.

“Oh yes, I almost forgot, Uncle. The Imams and emirs are waiting outside to see you.”

“Then send them in, Taqi. We shouldn’t keep high officials waiting.”

The holy men and rulers of provinces noisily entered Saladin’s tent. They were all abuzz with excited conversation. What should be done with the Jews and Byzantine Christians who remained in the city? Should the churches of the infidels be destroyed? One of the leading Imams stepped forward and excitedly spoke to Saladin.

“O Al Nasir, we have decided that you should spend the night in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also have decided that we should burn all of the churches and synagogues in the city in order to purge it of the infidel’s stench. Think of it, my Sultan—Mecca, Medina, and now Jerusalem—all of our holy places free from the filth of the infidels!

Hospitaller

Truly, Allah is great, and you are his mighty servant. You are the punishing sword of Allah's vengeance. You are Al-Nasir!"

Saladin walked to the edge of the tent where the flaps were open. He stared out at the holy city. He pondered on the many battles he had fought with the cross bearers over the years. They had defeated him several times before his recent string of victories, and they had always been amicable with him after his defeats. He thought of Baldwin IV, the former king of Jerusalem, a truly chivalrous knight if ever there was one. After wiping Saladin's army out at the battle of Montgisard ten years earlier, Baldwin made a favorable truce with him, and let him go with the few warriors he had left.

Once in Cairo, an army of Franks had Saladin and his men surrounded in a tower. The Franks were very chivalrous and had let Saladin go with just a minor peace treaty. They had even offered to knight him, but he politely declined the honor.

Despite these treaties, Saladin, at the time, was still determined to conquer Egypt from the Shia Fatimid rulers and their Frankish allies. He wanted to return it to the Sunni caliphate, but he could not see these noble warriors as evil. He could not envision destroying all of these noble people and their holy sites. It was true, some of them were not chivalrous and had committed hideous acts of violence, but so many noble knights—surely, Allah would not smile on him for destroying a good race of men.

Muslims were not all chivalrous either. They had also committed their own acts of depravity. Even now, the screams of the Christian women could be heard around the city as they were raped by their Muslim conquerors. War was truly an ugly business. The sooner it ended, the better. Saladin was a religious scholar as much as he was a warrior. War was an unavoidable, yet necessary evil. It was merely a means to a better end. Even so, Saladin could be ruthless in the practicality of war. He allowed his men to plunder Jerusalem for only two days, instead of the customary three. He intended to enter it on October 2, the day that the prophet—peace be upon him—was believed to have ascended into heaven from the Al-Aqsa mosque site. This

would truly seal his victory. An imam spoke up and interrupted the thoughts of Saladin.

“Sultan Saladin, what will you do?” The Imam asked curiously, and then continued. “We must move swiftly, my lord, and push the heathens out of Tyre and the entire coastline. Then we will be able to invade into Europe. Think of it, Saladin. You could be the Muslim conqueror of the heathen homelands! You have brought us so far already; now bring us that final step, my liege. Take the fight to the infidels on their soil.”

In the early days, before Saladin had become so popular, he was often forced by the council of Imams and emirs to change his plans according to their wishes. Now, since his great victory at Tiberius, few dared attempt to overrule him. The council was forced into a more advisory position. Saladin’s power and position were beginning to solidify. Common Muslims held him in very high esteem, second only to the prophet—peace be upon him. Saladin held up both hands as the noisy group of leaders argued. “Silence!” He shouted.

“I will not stay in the Al-Aqsa mosque. I am not the prophet—peace be upon him—and I do not deserve such an honor. The Eastern Christians will also be allowed back into their churches. They have done nothing to deserve the destruction of their holy places. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher shall not be burned. Also, the Latin churches are to be left alone. I promised Sir Balian with my word that upon the surrender of the city, no holy place—whether Christian or Muslim—would be destroyed. I will honor my treaty with them, as they have always done with me. However, we will continue our attacks on the lands held by the Latin Christians. We will drive them from our lands and send them back to Europe, but that will be the end of it. Now, leave me to rest. Soon we will move on Tyre. The Christian survivors are already retreating there.”

The imams turned and left Saladin. They were crying loudly, and some tore their robes as they left the tent. “Why, Allah, when total victory is in our grasp, do you cause our glorious leader to falter?”

Hospitaller

Taqi and Sarim stood just outside, in stunned silence, then they turned and left as Saladin lay down to rest. His Mamluk bodyguard stood an ominous watch around the tent. They observed Saladin very closely; especially since the time Hassan, the old man on the mountain, had his assassins make two attempts on Saladin's life. The first almost succeeded, having wounded Saladin. The second time the assassins merely left a knife in a pillow, warning Saladin to leave the assassins alone. Saladin complied with their warning and turned his attacks toward the Christians and Fatimids of Egypt.

Hassan ibn-Sabah and his assassins were the only ones that anyone could say struck visible fear into the heart of Saladin.

Hassan had started a strange version of Islam. He built a fortress on a mountaintop in northern Syria. From there he said that he could take over the world with a handful of dedicated followers. They used assassination as their tool of fear to force men and nations to comply with their will. It was said that they used hashish to get into a drug-induced state before going out to kill. All, both Muslim and Christian alike, feared the old man of the mountain. He had assassinated men of both faiths.

No one ever knew what was on the note the assassins left Saladin; he destroyed it immediately. Some said it was a threat on Saladin's family. He had seventeen children and a wife to worry about at home. After this note, Saladin quickly broke his siege of Hassan's mountain fortress and turned his attention against the Christians and Fatimids in Egypt.

Taqi and Sarim walked away from Saladin's tent and began to speak.

"I do not understand your uncle, Taqi. He can be completely ruthless when he wants to be, but now, when total victory is within our grasp, he waffles."

"I know, Sarim. I felt sorrow for the Christian women being violated, but we must kill all the men and drive these heathens from our

Joseph Lessard

lands. I cannot understand why he goes soft on them now, when we have them at our mercy. It is as though he fears his own success.”

Sarim stroked his mustache in thought.

“Perhaps, Taqi, he has a plan. He is much smarter than his predecessor, Nur al-Din was. That man was a brute. Saladin is more of an astute tactician. Look how far he has brought us. What Muslim would have ever dreamed that we would obliterate their army, and take back Jerusalem itself? Your uncle has brought us very far, my young friend.”

“Yes, indeed he has, Sarim. Let us give him some more time. Surely, he will not let us down. After all, he has the blessing of Allah upon him.”

The two men agreed and left for their tents.

Saladin lay in his candle-lit tent. He was so tired. He had been at war now for some twenty-odd years. He had fought both Christian and rival Muslim factions. Yes, he was bone-weary tired. He thought, *just a moments rest, Allah. It would be so wonderful just to have a moment to rest.*

Saladin quickly fell into a heavy sleep. He drifted off into dreams. He dreamt of his wife, who was currently in Egypt. They were walking together hand-in-hand in their garden palace on the Nile. Water fountains softly babbled, and flowering plants of many colors were all around. A multitude of birds dutifully sang their melodies in the nearby trees. They paused for a moment to take in the serenity of the garden, and then they went into the house as Saladin looked into her deep brown Egyptian eyes, and he felt safe. He forgot about war for a while. He forgot about the bloodshed, both Christian and Muslim. He forgot about sieges, beheadings, and the lines of bound Christian slaves being dragged off to the slave markets in Damascus. He forgot about the infidel women, crying as they were raped by the Mamluks. Yes, for a time he could forget it all. He could forget all the atrocities and horrors of it--at least for one brief moment.

Hospitaller

His wife sang to him a soft, soothing love song, and all the cares and worries of the world melted away. There was no strife, no killing, and no death. His wife bade him come--and he followed her. They went into the inner chamber, lay down on a silk-covered bed of pillows, and became one. The world was safer now. For a time, all was at rest and quiet; there was peace at last. He rested in the soft arms of his love. He was so tired and so weary from constant warfare. His wife whispered into his ear, "Rest now, my love; all is quiet, all is well." He stared at her beautiful raven hair, flowing gently over her soft copper skin--and drifted away.

Then--the advisor came to him.

In Saladin's dream, the advisor walked quietly through the open tent flaps. His Mamluk bodyguards appeared not to even notice him. He was dressed in simple attire. He wore a black turban on his head, and had on a simple blue one-piece garment. On his feet, he wore plain brown sandals. In appearance, he dressed much like a Bedouin nomad. Such a man would hardly cause anyone to take notice. He would not be surmised as an advisor to the ruler of millions. The advisor sat near Saladin and spoke to him from a clean-shaven Arabic-looking face.

"May Allah's blessings come upon you, my friend Saladin. You are the mighty sword of his vengeance. You are the slayer of the infidels. Allah is most pleased with you, Al Nasir. You, above all other of Allah's servants, have done the most to purge our holy lands from the infidel stench."

Saladin sat up in his dream to speak.

"Peace to you, messenger of Allah."

He paused, with a worried look on his face. He was having doubts about the necessity of so much slaughter, so much war, and so much death. He was weary, so weary, from year after year of strife. His body felt drained of all its energy. He could barely keep himself going.

The advisor looked at him, concerned.

Joseph Lessard

“What is it that troubles you, Saladin? Has Allah not been gracious with you, and stood by your side? Is he not compassionate and merciful? Has he not allowed you to succeed where so many have failed before you?”

Saladin took in a deep breath. He tried to think of words to say to express his doubts without fear, without the worry of retribution from Allah.

“Is it necessary for us to kill all the infidels, or to sell them into slavery? Can they not be given time to see the blessings of becoming a Muslim? There are so many valiant men among them. Is Allah not also compassionate and merciful? I beg of you to ask Allah to show himself divine by having mercy on these people.”

The advisor became angry. He looked sternly at Saladin and shouted.

“Enough! Is Allah not the one who created all? Did he not set the sun, the moon and the stars in the heavens? Is it not his decision, and his alone, what to do with his creatures? Who are you to question the all-divine Allah? He has gotten ready the flames for all the infidels, for all those who add gods to his name, far be it from him to have a son!”

The advisor paused. He looked at Saladin a little less sternly.

“O Saladin, has Allah not been most merciful to you? Did he not wake you from sleep in time when the assassins came to end your life? Did he not set you on the course to supreme power? Did he not remove all who blocked your path of becoming ruler over the Muslims? Do you remember Shawa, the vizier of Egypt, and your uncle Shirkuh, and what of Nur al-Din and his son? Did we not sweep all these men aside so that you could become supreme commander and unite the Muslims for Allah’s glory? Now, be brave, be strong, Al Nasir. You are his chosen one. With Allah’s help, you are the one who will save Islam from the infidels.”

Saladin looked down. He was ashamed that he had questioned Allah’s commandments as revealed in the Holy Koran.

Hospitaller

“I will do as Allah wishes; far be it from me to question Allah’s will.”

The advisor looked straight at Saladin without blinking. He changed his tone from a voice of scolding to a voice of concerned warning.

“I must warn you, Saladin, a mighty warrior is coming to these shores--a king. He is like no other infidel warrior that you have faced thus far. They call him ‘the Lionhearted.’” He lives for the fight; he thrives in war. He will be the biggest test of your skill as a warrior. Two other kings come with him as well. One will come by land through Cilicia; the Lionhearted and the other will come by sea.” The advisor got up and slowly walked out of the tent. Saladin did not even notice exactly when he could no longer be seen.

“Make ready for a war like no other, Saladin, and call on Allah. He will surely save you.

Be wise, be ready, and tremble in fear when you see the red banner with the gold lions. It will take all your strength and cunning to defeat this king.”

Saladin suddenly sat straight up in his tent. He jolted up to a standing position. His body was racked with pain, and his clothing was drenched with sweat. Beads of sweat were also running down his forehead. He felt as if he had a fever. This always happened to him when he spoke to the advisor.

Al-Aldil (Saphadin), his younger brother, suddenly walked in.

“Are you all right, my brother? You look as though you’ve seen a jinni.”

Saladin struggled to regain his sight. His eyes were still blurry from his deep sleep.

“Oh, it is you, Saphi. I thought you were him.”

Saphidin looked around and saw no one else in the tent.

“Who do you refer to my brother? There is no one else here.”

“Oh, never mind, Saphi. What time is it?”

“It is nearly morning, brother, the second of October. You have slept for a very long time. Today is the day the prophet—peace be upon him—ascended into heaven from the Al-Aqsa Mosque site. It is a most holy and blessed day. Will you enter the city today?”

Saladin struggled to get his thoughts together.

“Yes, help me get my things in order. I will say my morning prayers in the mosque.”

Saphadin smiled a very big smile. He was very loyal to his older brother. Saladin had always watched over him since their boyhood in Tikrit. He had even saved him once from the neighborhood bully, an Arab boy who did not like Kurds. Saladin was a scholarly youth; but he still managed to give the bully a good thrashing.

Now they mounted their horses and rode together on horseback toward the gateway into Jerusalem. Saladin spoke to his brother while they rode. The two were always together, almost inseparable.

“Saphi, I must thank you for getting Egypt back in order so quickly after my son, Al-Afdal, bungled it so badly. He nearly caused the region to go back over to the Franks, and he had the Copts ready to riot from his mistreatment.”

“I did it to serve Allah—and you, my brother. There is no need to thank me.”

The men rode through the gate into the city. Crowds of Muslims cheered loudly, yelling, “Al Nasir! Al Nasir! Allah u Akbar...”

The two men waved and humbly rode on. They dismounted and walked through the frantic mob. People pressed in on every side, while Saladin’s Mamluk guards pushed them back so Saladin could enter the Al Aqsa mosque. The two brothers entered the dim, smoky, candle-lit mosque for the first time. Saladin felt overwhelmed with emotions. Here he was, a humble scholar of the Holy Koran, made reluctant warrior, delivering one of the holiest sites in Islam back to the faithful. In that emotional moment, he realized that his name would go down in

Hospitaller

history. Even if he did nothing else, his place was secure as a Muslim hero for all time.

Saladin and Saphadin laid down their prayer mats and knelt in happy prayers. Indeed, they had reason to rejoice. Once again, the Muezzin called the faithful to prayer. "*Allah u Akbar, Allah u Akbar...*" This was a festive day for all the Muslims.

Byzantine Christians and Jews hid in their houses out of fear of the victorious people of Islam.

Muslim warriors and citizens scrambled to see the great Saladin as he left the Al Aqsa Mosque. They shouted for their hero. They were in a frenzied state. "Al Nasir! Al Nasir!"

They had also tied what the Christians referred to as "the true cross" to the back of a donkey. They had taken this from the defeated Franks at Lake Tiberius. Saladin had his men drag it through the streets and alleyways of Jerusalem, behind the donkey. This he felt would satisfy his men and prove to them that he was not easy on the Christians. It would also serve notice to all that Islam was the true and powerful faith.

Saladin returned to his tent, accompanied by his brother and his Mamluk bodyguard.

For the time being, the Muslims were on the offensive and in control of Jerusalem. They now held control of their own destiny, so long as they could remain united.

On October 30, 1187, C.E. Saladin broke camp at Jerusalem. He went north and attacked Antioch. Unable to crack it by siege, he made a truce with its ruler, Bohemund III, which lasted eight months. Bohemund was a skillful tactician and had prepared his forts well for the siege. Saladin was unable to break in.

Saladin next settled in for a siege of Tyre. He was also unable to break Tyre, especially after Conrad of Montserrat arrived with his forces to defend the city. Conrad had designs on the crown of

Joseph Lessard

Jerusalem. He thought of King Guy as a disgrace, having lost at Hattin, and now at Jerusalem itself.

Saladin captured Sidon, Acre, and a few other small Christian forts. Following these victories, he took some rest in Damascus in March of 1189 C.E. Saladin's forces then moved back to Acre in September of 1189 C.E. King Guy of Jerusalem and a Pisan fleet, having been bared from Tyre by his rival Conrad, were besieging Saladin's garrison there.

All forces, Christian and Muslim, were at this point moving into position for a showdown at Acre. Many brave and noble men—Frank, English, German, Austrian, Mamluk, Atabeg, Arab, Kurd, and Seljuq— would die at the walls and in the fields of Acre.

*“O Dawn that has cast its shadows upon the
unbelievers, shrouding them in eternal night!*

*O Dawn that has brought new life to Islam, shedding the
radiance of everlasting day!”*

*The Crusades: Iron men and Saints and the Flame of
Islam by Harold Lamb*

Copyright, 1930, 1931

Hospitaller



The Holy Land in 1187 C.E.

Chapter Ten

The Wall Comes Down



“On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (Jesus) from a tree. And an announcer went out in front of him for forty days, saying: ‘he is going to be stoned, because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor let him come and plead in his behalf.’ But not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of Passover.”

**Ancient Jews described crucifixion as hanging. Also, if the Romans did not hang Jesus, the Jewish leaders planned to stone him. This was their punishment for blasphemy.*

This writing is from The Babylonian Talmud, an ancient Jewish commentary written during the first through the sixth century C.E. by Rabbis living in Babylonia.

Joseph Lessard

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked his disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’

So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’

He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’

Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’

Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’

Matthew 16:13-17 (New King James Version)

Richard lay on the cot in his tent. The hot desert air made him sweat even more profusely as he burned with fever. Servants came and went, attending to the king's needs. They wiped his brow with damp cloths in hopes of keeping his fever down.

The king sent a messenger to Saladin and gave him a male slave as a gift. He wanted to know if Saladin would like to meet before they started their war. Saladin sent the messenger back, thanking Richard for the gift. He sent a fruit basket as a gift in return because he had heard that Richard was ill with fever. Saladin thought it would be better for them to meet when the war was over.

Richard admired the accomplishments of his Moslem foe and diligently studied his strategy. Saladin was also fascinated by the one they called "Lionhearted."

Hospitaller

Richard was surrounded in his tent by his nobles. The men saw the state of their king; they whispered amongst themselves as to what action they should take. The high hopes they had felt when they left England were dwindling. This was a bad omen, for their leader to fall ill at the start of their war with Saladin. *Perhaps God has not blessed their venture after all*; they thought to themselves.

Richard kept his treasure in gold bezants in his tent with him. It sat in a large wooden chest. A throng of loyal guards kept watch over both him and the gold.

The king looked past the guards and saw the doubt in the eyes of his nobles. He could see their downcast faces. He fought through his illness and shouted at them,

“Stop all that murmuring! You men, you noble men of England know what must be done. You know why we have come here. You know why we have assembled the best-paid and best-equipped army in all of Christendom. So get to it! I will be on my feet soon enough, and by then I expect progress. God is on our side, good gentlemen, and soon Saladin will know this; he will come to fear the banners of our English army. Now get to work, and no more of this murmuring. It is bad for the morale of the men.”

The nobles looked up and hastily answered their king. They knew their leader was strong-willed. If anyone could beat the plague, it was Richard the Lionhearted.

“Yes, your majesty. We will prepare the army for you.”

The knights simply stood and stared, while the king asked more questions. They were amazed that he was still able to think so clearly while he was so ill. Richard badgered,

“Have the stone throwers and siege engines been brought ashore and assembled yet?”

The men looked at each other until one piped up with an answer.

“Yes, my lord. I believe the work has already begun. They should be ready in a few days.”

“Good, good! Very well, concentrate on the stone throwers first, and start bombarding the walls as soon as they are assembled. Once I am on my feet, we will move the siege engines up to the walls and begin the attack. I want Acre taken quickly, with as little loss of life as possible. We need to hurry and make it to Jerusalem before winter.”

Richard looked out through his open tent flaps. He gazed at the field of wooden crosses, and at the Christian ditch in the plains of Acre. It surrounded the city. In the distance, beyond the ditch, through a desert haze, he could just make out the Moslem flags. They were fluttering in a slow breeze atop their tents. He wondered what his rival Saladin was doing at that very moment. *What schemes could Satan’s servant dream up this very hour?*

Dozens of black vultures floated in the flaming desert sky in Norman’s Land between the two camps. The death stalkers dove down and feasted upon the carcasses of rotting horseflesh and the bodies of a few men still lying unburied. War could paint a thousand ugly portraits like this one--the scavenging of noble dead warriors.

Richard cleared his dry throat and spoke again. “Where is King Philip? What has my noble ally been doing since his arrival here in April? Does anyone have news of him?”

A knight responded, “My lord, the Duke of Burgundy, Hugh III, is here, along with Henry of Champagne, Archbishop Tobias, and Sir Balian. Perhaps they can enlighten you on King Philip’s whereabouts and actions.”

Duke Hugh stepped forward. He was a tall, dark-haired, noble-looking knight, with a neatly trimmed goatee. He was a proud-looking Frenchman in his chain-mail armor.

“King Richard, I have taken command of the French forces here at Acre. We attacked the wall shortly after King Philip’s arrival. We almost breached it, but we were forced to retire when Saladin attacked the outer ditch of the camp. I am sad to say that we took very heavy losses in our attempt at the wall. The heathens are quite resourceful. They also have the fire of the Greeks, and they burnt our siege engines

Hospitaller

with it. King Philip has retired to his tent and placed me back in charge of the army. We are now at a stalemate with the Mohammedans.”

The duke paused for a moment, then continued slowly, as if saying something he had to say but did not truly believe. His eyes darted back and forth.

“But good king, now that you are here with your army, we will prevail against the infidels. By virtue of your station, you are now in command of all Christian forces, my lord. That is if you are able, or should I say, once you are well enough. I do not believe we will see much more of King Philip on the battlefield.”

Duke Hugh looked at the ground, a humbled man. He was ashamed of his king, but he still had no love for the English or their king, yet he felt a twinge of hope at Richard’s arrival. Even though Richard was ill, he still had a very commanding presence. He exuded an aura of self-confidence. He was just what this demoralized, loosely knit Christian federation needed.

Richard stared at the duke in wonderment at these events. One of the English nobles standing behind the duke gestured to his mouth, as if drinking. He was referring to Philip’s condition. Richard got the picture. Philip was known to drink under stress. Richard’s father, Henry, had been right about one thing: when facing difficulties, Philip, was a whiney, weak, spineless, drunkard.

“You men leave me now. I expect to hear the stone throwers at work soon. For now, I must get some rest. Let the army rest. They will need their strength. Very soon, Saladin and his Saracens will hear from us. This will be a glorious war—a war like no other fought in this place since the days of Gideon. Sharpen your swords, my nobles, and raise your shields. Tighten down your helmet straps; war has been decreed! And it will be glorious!”

As the nobles were leaving, Balian gave a respectful nod to the king. The king gestured with his hand for him to stay. After the others had gone, he spoke with Balian.

“Sir Balian, I know you and your men are quite skilled in warfare. I heard of your deeds at Jerusalem against Saladin. Tell me your opinion of the situation here, and tell me of my foe Saladin. Is he a chivalrous heathen, as they say, or is he just another devil?”

Balian looked at the king and took note of his features. He still appeared strong, even through his illness. Some men exuded an aura of strength and stature, no matter what conditions they found themselves under at the time. Balian could tell that this tall king, with hair the color of fire, was one such man. Philip most assuredly was not.

“Sire, the men who have been here throughout this siege have suffered greatly. They have a firm faith in our cause. They have survived starvation, abandonment, poor leadership, plague, and the swords of the heathen army. These men have died by the thousands for their faith in Jesus Christ and the kingdom of heaven. Even with poor leadership, they have held back the Islamic hordes of Saladin. They even came close to breaking into the high-walled city of Acre. All they need is a strong, fearless leader—a man who believes in the noble cause as they do, one who will lead from the front, and they could beat back the minions at the gates of Hades itself. My king, you are that leader, sent to us by the will of God!”

King Richard stared at Balian for a moment. He thought back to the time at the church in Poitou when the sun burst forth from the clouds and illuminated him in its glow. He felt the same overwhelming feeling at that very moment. It was his destiny, written in the heavens long ago, even before his birth, to be the savior of the kingdom of heaven on earth at this very moment in time. Divine providence had brought King Richard the Lionhearted to these shores to face down the heathen’s greatest leader, Saladin.

“Tell me of Saladin. It is said that you know him. Some even say you have befriended the heathen leader.”

“Yes, I know him, my king; however, I would not necessarily call it a friendship. It is more like a mutual respect between two warriors. He is one of the few of his faith who act chivalrously. We share a

warrior's respect between us. It is something people who are not soldiers could never understand, especially if they are backbiting bureaucrats. But have no doubts; he is also a ruthless enemy. After Hattin, he beheaded all the warrior monks of the temple and the hospital. He will do what he has to do to defeat you as well."

King Richard looked out through the open tent flaps again toward Saladin's tents in the distance. He stared into the desert haze for a moment, then said,

"And I would do nothing less, Sir Balian. Chivalry and ruthlessness, good and evil, a true leader must balance them both. He must decide when to be harsh and when to be merciful; therein lays the key to true leadership. After all, Christ drove the money changers out with a whip in one moment and healed a blind man in the next."

Balian thought the king wise after this statement. He had new hope for victory.

Back In Byzantium:

It was almost dark, and a deep red sun was setting into the hills behind the horizon west of the city of Constantinople. Phoebe walked out of the Hagia Sophia church, where she had just lit a candle and said her prayers. She knew now what she must do. She was tired of sitting idly by and waiting while her man faced the heathens without her comfort. Whether good came or evil, come life or death, angels or demons or hell's minions, her place was by her man. She wished to be nowhere else. God was calling her to Acre. She knew this deep down in her heart: her man needed her.

She snuck down the darkened alleyways toward the harbor. Sheba had been watching Phoebe, and she followed closely behind, staying just out of sight. When Phoebe came to a ship in the harbor that was preparing to leave for Acre with supplies, she stopped. She looked up at the large menacing wooden vessel and took in a deep breath. *Confidence, Phoebe*, she thought to herself.

She found a deckhand and asked him if she could speak with the captain. He looked at her strangely.

“Wait here,” he said, and then he went and spoke with him.

“Captain, there is a lady of the court outside, one of high stature, asking to speak with you.”

The grizzled old captain looked at his sailor as if unbelieving and asked, “How do you know she is a lady? Why would a lady come here to the docks and talk with old sailors? Have you been drinking on watch again, Nikomedes?”

“Oh, no captain, I have not. She is a lady, though. She is dressed in fine clothes and wears a purple robe; she has on gold jewelry as well. I could not say why she has come to the docks, though.”

“Very well, I will come to the pier and speak with her.”

The captain walked down the wooden plank to the dock and looked in amazement at the noble woman in fine robes standing there. He thought, *She must be from the imperial court, but why would she come here alone? This is a most curious thing. I will speak with her.*

“My lady, I am Captain Markellos. How may I be of service to you?”

Phoebe held out a small cloth purse toward Captain Markellos. He was dirty, wearing a crumpled hat, and the brown dirty clothes of a man of the docks.

“Here are ten gold bezants. I need passage to Acre, and I understand that you are on your way there, Captain.”

“Yes, we are on our way there. However, this is no passenger ship, my lady. There are no comforts on board for a woman of your high stature. Surely a finer passenger ship must be leaving soon—one more suited for your comforts.”

Phoebe looked desperate. “The next ship to Acre is not for a week. I must get there immediately. I should have never stayed behind. You see, the man I am to marry is at Acre, fighting the Saracens. I should

be— no, I must be by his side. I cannot sit here anymore, Captain Markellos!”

The captain looked at the noblewoman. He could see the desperation in her eyes. It was the look of a desperate woman separated from the one she truly loved. He felt pity for her. His wife often felt the same way while he was away on long sea voyages.

“All right, I will take you there. I cannot offer much but a modest cabin, though. I will only charge you two bezants for it. Any more money than that and you will give an old sea-hand a guilty conscience. Come aboard, my lady.”

Sheba rushed out to Phoebe from the shadows.

“My lady, take me! Please my lady, take me with you! I must see Sergius again. You cannot leave me here alone! I must see my man!”

Sheba looked pitifully at Phoebe, then at the captain. Both women now looked at the captain sadly. He could not handle two women begging in such a way. He finally broke down from their sad stares.

“All right, all right, that will be two more bezants though. I am not running a passenger ship, you know. This is a supply ship—grain and arms mainly.”

The women were giddy with happiness.

“Thank you, Captain. May the Lord bless you for your kindness.”

Suddenly, another woman burst forth from the shadows. It was Chloe, Erik’s wife.

The captain looked at the third woman and said, “Oh no, no, no! Absolutely not, that is it, no more passengers!”

Chloe hurriedly spoke up.

“Oh no, do not worry, Captain. My lady, I am not asking to go with you. I have a home to attend to here and relatives to care for. All I ask is that you give my dear Erik this message for me.”

Chloe handed Phoebe a folded parchment.

“And tell him to come home to me soon. Tell him I miss him, and I love him.”

Phoebe looked at Chloe and smiled. They both had tears in their eyes.

“I will deliver your message. You are a strong Byzantine woman, stay strong, Chloe. Your man will be home soon. I will pray for him.”

With that, they boarded the ship and sailed to Acre. Five days later, they arrived off the shoreline of the city. Phoebe and Sheba went ashore and immediately asked around for their men.

While Phoebe and Sheba were on their way from Byzantium, there was much activity at Acre. The six mangonels and three larger stone throwers pounded the walls of the city. The siege engines were now ready, and Richard ordered the attack. He was still somewhat ill, but he managed to mount his horse to command the battle.

They pushed the large wooden siege engines up to the walls of Acre. Each one had no less than fifty armed knights inside. Archers were on top to keep the Moslem archers on the wall pinned down. When they reached the wall, wooden ramps came down from them and the men poured out onto the fortifications of Acre. Fierce fighting broke out on the battlements. The clang of metal swords and the screams of men echoed out into the plains. Soon, however, the Moslems threw clay pots of Greek fire onto the wooden engines, and they burst into flames. Most of the first wave of knights died on the wall or in the fire. They died bravely for their faith in God and His earthly kingdom.

Nevertheless, Richard did not give up at this first setback. He had one more trick up his sleeve. At his command, the knights rolled a large siege engine forward, filled with soldiers and archers. This engine was different. The siege engine had copper plates completely covering its surface in order to resist the fire of the Greeks. The men had painted the words “bad neighbor” on the side of it. Karakush, the Moslem commander in Acre, looked out at it and felt despair overcome him.

“Surely these heathens will break in and kill us all.”

The engine reached the wall. Once more, a ramp came down and knights poured out onto the parapet. These new English knights were fresh and vigorous. Starving and weakened, the Moslem soldiers began to fall by the sword. Karakush heard his men screaming.

He yelled to his reserve, “Bring the Greek fire. Throw it on that siege engine until it burns.”

A Moslem soldier responded, “Sir, we only have a little bit of the fire left—maybe twenty pots. Should we waste them on a metal tower that might not even burn?”

Karakush was insistent.

“It is wood underneath. Perhaps we will get lucky, if Allah wills it. Throw them at the siege tower now!”

The Moslems sent in a large attack wave, their last reserve. They threw all twenty clay pots onto the copper-plated siege engine. Most of them bounced off it and fell harmlessly to the ground. One lucky throw made it through an opening and onto the wooden decking inside. The engine burst into flames. Knights inside screamed as they burned alive. A cheer went up inside Acre, “*Allah u Akbar!*”

Richard looked down, dismounted his horse, and headed toward his tent. He turned his head, looked at his nobles and said, “This is going to take longer than we thought, but in the end, we will prevail. By the grace of God, we will prevail!”

He went into his tent to rest. He would have to come up with a cleverer plan to breach the walls of Acre. He entered his tent and knelt in prayer. “Oh Lord, my God, you did not send me all the way to this land to be defeated by a high wall. You are the God who tears down walls, moves mountains, and slays giants. Prove to these heathens that you are greater than their false god is. Prove to them that Allah is not God. Send me a messenger to show us the way. I ask you now for your aid through your Son, the Christ, Amen!”

There were some Moslem prisoners taken in the latest attack. Sergius had been angered so much by the Christian defeats at the wall that he went to the place where they were imprisoned. He bribed the guard outside to let him into the prison. Once inside, Sergius took his anger out on the heathen prisoners. He beheaded all thirteen of them. He left the prison covered in blood, with a far off stare in his eyes, and then he returned to his tent, vomited, and wept bitterly. He had allowed his anger to turn to hatred and it had overcome his reason. In his heart, he was paying them back for the death of his family as well.

Upon hearing from the guard, Amalric quickly came and arrested Sergius. He put him into his prison. He looked at Sergius, bewildered, and asked,

“Sergius, why have you done this? We needed to interrogate these prisoners to find out about weak spots in the wall. What you have done is not war, but murder. You have become like our enemy, slaughtering the defenseless. We are a nobler people than they are. We are the children of God. May He have mercy on you, brother?”

Sergius looked up at Amalric. “I allowed my hatred of them to overwhelm me, brother. They butchered my family in Africa. I wanted to do the same to them--to all of them. Now all I feel is a deep emptiness inside of me. What can I do, brother?”

“Go to God, Sergius. Only He has the answers.”

The Unknown sat in his tent, staring into the yellow flickering flame of a candle. He had just heard about what Sergius had done. He closed his eyes tightly. Things were now weighing heavily on the Unknown’s soul. He was weary, and tired of all the failed attacks on the wall.

First Emperor Frederick had died. Then King Philip failed in his attack. Now King Richard’s attack on the wall failed too. Saladin’s forces were also slowly growing stronger outside the Christian ditch. Something would have to happen, and happen soon, or all might be lost. Balian walked in and greeted the Unknown.

Hospitaller

“Good evening, friend. Why the long face?”

“Did you hear about Sergius?”

Baldwin paused for a moment, then replied quietly,

“Yes, very disturbing, and surprising from him. However, sometimes the wounds we receive in life can cause us to act illogically. I will pray for him. Any one of us could act the same, given the right circumstances.”

The Unknown looked at Balian with a lost, desperate, sad look on his face. Balian was dressed in his chain mail armor. He wore a light blue tunic over it, with a yellow Jerusalem cross, embroidered on the front. The Unknown stared at the cross. He started to think of his vision again, the one that had brought him to this far-off desolate place. He felt doubt creep into his spirit.

“What am I doing here, Balian? What am I doing with these men? One is a murderer; another is a coward, another is a drunken suicidal Jew killer. Now, even with our greatest warrior king here, we still cannot break through the Moslem wall. I wonder sometimes—oh, how I wonder—if we have not lost it all, my brother. Perhaps we should leave before Saladin overruns our ditch and kills us all. We can at least live to fight another day. Maybe we should start thinking of defending Europe instead of fighting here.”

Balian put his hand over his mouth, scratched at his goatee, and thought for a minute. The Unknown may be right. They had lost so many men, so many close friends, tried so hard, and for so long. They were all losing hope. You could see it in the eyes of all the men. Even with King Richard, they had still failed at the wall. The men now held their heads low after the last defeat at the walls of Acre. Surely Saladin would also attack the outer ditch, and soon. How much further could faith and hope carry this army?”

Jonathan sat quietly in a darkened corner of the tent. He stood up and approached the Unknown. After a short pause, he said, “God sent

you here, my lord. Do you remember? You had a vision. He has sent you here to make a difference. He has a purpose for you.”

The Unknown looked up at Jonathan. His quick, clear, simple statement cut right through him. His young dark-haired squire had just reminded him of the reason he had been sent here. His pure faith brought the Unknown back to his senses. He was here by the will of God in order to have some effect on events in this place, this holy sacred place. At that very moment, Phoebe walked in. It was as if the sun had just come out and peeled away the dreary gray clouds of self-doubt and sadness.

“Phoebe, what are you doing here? It is not safe for you in this place! If the heathens got their hands on you, I would never forgive myself!”

“Oh my brave knight, my love, did you think I could just sit at home, not knowing your fate? Come good or evil, come life or death, my place is by your side. It will always be by your side. We are about to make the marriage covenant between God and ourselves. My place is with you; I will not sit in some far-off palace ever again!”

Phoebe and the Unknown embraced for a long time, and then Sheba interrupted. “Where is my Sergius? I must see him. Is he still alive?”

Sheba looked desperately at the Unknown. Her deep brown eyes looked sad and anxious.

“He is alive, Sheba; however, he got into a little trouble. I will take you to him.”

After Sheba and Sergius had greeted each other, Sergius told her what had happened.

“Why would you do such a thing, Sergius? If you act as they do, then you are no different than they are. What are we going to do now? We were to be married.”

Hospitaller

“I know it was wrong, Sheba; but I just kept seeing what the Moslems did to my family. I hated them for it! I wanted to kill every one of them!”

Sheba thought for a moment, and then replied with wisdom. “I know you still believe in God, Sergius. God said to love your enemies. As hard as that is, we must do it, and leave vengeance up to Him.”

“You can love a murderer, Sheba, but you still fear his rage. I fear these Moslems. They want to conquer the world for Allah and make the rest of us their slaves. I will pray on this whole matter, though. I will ask God to forgive me. I will not murder again, but I will fight them on the battlefield. They kill in the name of their god, Allah, and expect a reward for it. We kill out of self-defense. We kill for the survival of our faith.”

Sheba looked at Balian and the Unknown. It was the stare of a desperate woman, one who did not want to lose her true love. They felt compelled to help him.

“We will talk to Amalric and see what we can do. Many strange things happen in war. Both sides make mistakes. Perhaps we can give Sergius a second chance.”

Sheba replied, “That is all we ask for, my lords—a second chance.”

Sergius looked at the Unknown and added, “I will not let you down, friend.”

Balian and the Unknown talked Amalric into releasing Sergius to them after paying a fine. The Unknown then went to Sergius and said, “Do not let us down, brother. More importantly, do not let God down again.”

After that, the Unknown walked out of the camp by himself. He needed to pray. He needed to be alone with God and alone with his thoughts. He stood underneath an ebon sky, thickly dotted with bright blue stars. He wandered past the ditch and into No-man’s Land, between the two armies. He looked up to heaven and cried out to God.

Joseph Lessard

“Oh Lord, I have had doubts! You have sent me here to make a difference, and all I have done is make a mess of things. I have with me a murderer, a Jew killer, a coward, and myself. I am a man full of fear, doubt, and self-pity. What could you possibly do with me? Send me another messenger, God. I am weak, and I need you to once more show me the way.”

The Unknown stretched out on the ground, rested his head on a rock, and fell into a deep sleep. He was tired and weary. He felt run down by this war, and even he had been losing hope. Hope dwindled under trials and adversities. It needed prayer and supplication to replenish it.

Suddenly, a bright light shone all around him, and the angel of the Lord came to him in his dream. His clothes were as white as the snow atop Mount Carmel, and his belt was of fine pure gold. In his right hand, he held a large double-edged sword. In his left hand, the Book of Wisdom. The Unknown knelt low in his dream and said, “Uriel, is it you? Have you brought me an answer from my God Most High?”

“Yes, it is I, Uriel. God has heard your cries and has sent me, your angel, to show you the way. Watch now, knight, where I go, and that will be the path you are to take. Do not go to the right or to the left of it; take only the path I show you. God has sent you here to tear down a wall, to move a mountain, and to slay a giant. He has also sent you here to turn the hearts of an army toward Him. He has chosen you, a knight of low station, to work his wonders. Give glory to God, Unknown knight, and he will guide your path. However, first, I hold the sword of Michael, the warrior angel, and the Book of Wisdom. Touch these and you will have the might of Michael and the Wisdom of Solomon as your tools.”

The Unknown knight stood up and touched the sword and the book.

Then the angel of the Lord floated over the field, past the ditch and the Christian camp, until he came to rest over a tower on the left side of the wall. The Unknown heard him say, “Here is where you will attack,

Hospitaller

and only here. God will deliver this city into your hands if you obey Him in all things. God knows that you seek to serve Him and Him alone. He has chosen you to answer a king's prayer and to give hope to the armies of Christendom."

Then the angel of the Lord disappeared from sight.

Joseph Lessard

12 July, 1191C.E:

“Wake up, my lord! Wake up! It is not safe here. We must leave at once before the Moslems see us.”

The Unknown opened his eyes as Jonathan shook him. He stood up and said, “I am up, boy. You do not have to keep shaking me. This is twice now you have woken me up from my visions. However, do not worry. I know what to do.”

“Thank goodness, look where we are. We must get out of here before we are spotted!”

The Unknown looked across the field and saw the Saracen tents nearby. He looked back at Jonathan and said,

“Come, Jonathan. Do not mope about. Follow me. We must not keep the Saracens waiting.”

The Unknown walked back to the outer ditch, and then he walked through the Christian camp and to the inner ditch facing the wall of Acre. Baldwin saw him and stared puzzlingly in his direction. The Unknown had walked right past him without even a nod. He walked along the trenches until he found the tower that he had seen in his dream, and then he leapt up onto the earth works and sprinted forth toward the tower. Jonathan yelled after him, “My lord, what are you doing? It is suicide! You cannot reach the wall! The archers will get you!”

Jonathan turned to a soldier in the ditch and said, “Quick, give me your shield!”

He jumped over the ditch, and sprinted after the Unknown. The Unknown slowed down a little, allowing Jonathan to catch up to him. They were both now completely out of breath.

“Have you--gone mad? What--are you doing, my lord?”

The Unknown smiled at the youth. They were both wet from the morning dew, yet they still began to sweat under the early morning sun and from their sprint.

Hospitaller

“Let us go, Jonathan; I am showing this army the way. By the will of God, I am showing it the way.”

The Unknown rushed forward again. Two hundred more paces, and he reached the wall. Drums began to bang in the city. Trumpets blew and cymbals clanged. The Moslem archers rushed to their positions atop the walls of Acre. They began to shoot arrows down at the Unknown and at Jonathan. Jonathan held up the shield to block the volleys, but it was not large enough to protect them both. Somehow, the arrows kept missing them. The Unknown reached up to where there was a crack in the base of the tower. He grabbed at a stone in the crack and pulled it free. It was slippery with sand, but he managed to pull it out, then he turned and ran for the Christian ditch.

King Richard heard all the noise and came out of his tent, rubbing his eyes. He looked at one of his knights and asked, “What is all the noise? Is there a Saracen attack?”

“No, my king, there is no attack.”

“Speak up, then. What in the name of Saint Peter is going on? Why are the Saracens making that hideous racket?”

The soldier pointed toward Acre.

“Look toward that tower on the western part of the wall, my king. It appears to be a couple of suicides.”

King Richard rubbed his eyes and peered out through the morning mist toward the walls of Acre. In the rock-strewn field he could see a Hospitaller knight running toward the ditch, with a rock from the wall in his hand. Next to him was a squire, holding up a shield to protect his lord. The king thought for a moment; he thought that this was indeed strange--then it struck him. He quickly perked up and shouted, “No! No, not a suicide--it is not a suicide at all. What a high and noble deed! What a selfless and mighty act! By heaven and all its holy angels, that knight has shown us the way! Guards, bring me my horse! Sound the alarm! To arms, to arms, Acre is ours!”

Joseph Lessard

The soldier blew a trumpet, and another brought King Richard his horse. Men began to come out of their tents. King Richard shouted, “Bring that knight and his squire to me!”

They brought the Unknown and Jonathan before the king. They knelt before him, and then they placed the stone from the wall on the ground. King Richard looked at the two men, with a smile stretched across his face. It was the happiest expression anyone had seen on the king since he had arrived in the Holy Land.

“Rise up, brave one. What is your name, Sir Knight?”

The Unknown was panting for breath. Nevertheless, he answered the king.

“My king, I am the Unknown; I have made an oath with God not to use my earthly name in this place and to take no glory upon myself. I cannot reveal my name again until my task here is complete and I return home. God has sent me here through a vision to have some affect on what happens here. I am here by His will. I serve Him, and the king.”

The king gazed in amazement at the Hospitaller knight who stood before him. He was a tall, sandy blond-haired, strong warrior. His chain mail armor glinted in the sunlight. Atop it, he wore the deep blue tunic of his order; on it was the white cross of the Hospital of Saint John.

He must be a messenger from God, sent to answer a king's prayers, Richard thought to himself. The king then said,

“Indeed you are here by the will of the Most High. A humble knight with no name in service to God, what a novel thing that is, now I have new hope for victory. God has answered this king's prayer.”

The king looked at the Unknown for a moment, and then he beckoned the guards to bring his treasure chest from the tent. He told his guard, “Give this man two gold bezants for that stone.”

Richard looked at Jonathan and said,

“You have chosen your lord well. Kneel before your king.”

Hospitaller

Jonathan knelt as Richard took a sword from his armor bearer. He dubbed Jonathan with the sword and said, "Rise up, Sir Jonathan. Serve God well, and serve your king."

Richard gave Jonathan the sword and some chain mail armor to wear into battle.

"I know you will wear these bravely, Jonathan, as you have served the Unknown bravely.

Then Richard shouted out to all the knights and people that were now gathering around, "Two gold bezants for every stone from yonder tower!"

Dozens of men burst rapidly forth toward the tower. They worked in pairs. One held the shield while the other grabbed a stone from the base of the tower. They shared the reward afterwards. Soon Baldwin saw and heard what was going on. He rushed from his tent.

"Damn him! Damn that knight--I should have taken care of him a long time ago. He will not steal all the glory on this day! Sir Baldwin shall soon be the hero!"

Baldwin ran toward the tower, with his squire chasing behind him. He was angry and ran far ahead of his squire and the protection of his shield.

The Moslems were now atop the walls of Acre in mass. They were launching volleys of arrows down at the cross-bearers. Several knights lay dead, their bodies piled up near the base of the tower. Baldwin reached it and grabbed at the slippery stones. He pulled one free, turned, and ran away with it. He wiped sweat from his eyes with his free hand as he ran. Suddenly, he felt a sharp pain in his back, then another. Baldwin fell to the ground with two arrows in his back.

His squire got to him. He threw down his shield and carried Baldwin back to the Christian camp. He took him to the hospital tent, which was run by the Unknown's order.

Joseph Lessard

The people made a pile of dozens of stones before King Richard, but it was still not enough. They would need to remove many more stones from the wall.

Richard shouted out, “Three--three gold bezants for every stone from yonder tower!”

Now, instead of dozens, hundreds of people rushed toward the tower. Knights, priests, peasants, even women rushed toward the tall, menacing tower. Some fell from Moslem arrows. Others blocked the projectiles with shields. Hundreds pulled stones from the base of the tower and ran back to the Christian camp for their reward. The Unknown was now on his fourth stone. King Richard sat on his horse, shouting out encouragement.

“O high deeds, O noble heavenly acts of courage! O Prester John, come with your Christian army of the east and aid us! Gabriel, blow your trumpet! Uriel, plead with the Father of heaven on our behalf. O Michael, warrior angel of the Most High, let a good and noble king make use of your sword! Your humble messenger, the Unknown Knight, has shown us the way! Show us the way, Unknown Knight, to the cross and the Christ and to the kingdom of heaven!”

Saphidin, Sarim, and Baha al-Din all rushed to Saladin’s tent and burst in.

“Sultan, Sultan, you must come! The Christians are massing their attack on one single tower! If it falls, Acre will be lost!”

Saladin pulled his weary body up and went out to look. He looked upon the attack on the wall, and then closed his eyes.

“This is it. Sound the attack! Every man must attack the Christian ditch. We must break through, or Acre is most assuredly lost!”

A large body of Moslems, some on horseback and others on foot, charged across No-man’s Land. Cries of “*Allah u Akbar*” echoed through the Christian camp. The army was no less than seventy thousand strong. The Christians in the ditch saw the dark menacing formation coming at them. King Richard saw it too. He was a better

Hospitaller

general than Philip had been, and he was ready for such an attack. He had placed the Pisan and Flemish archers in the ditch, along with the German, French, Austrian, and other assorted soldiers. He kept his English knights and some of the French in reserve for the attack on Acre itself.

The king gave the order and the mangonels sent stones crashing into the large Moslem formation. As it got closer to the ditch, the Christian archers unloaded one volley, and then another. Hundreds of the Saracens fell dead and wounded. The screams of the heathen wounded echoed into the Christian trench.

They finally reached the ditch, under a hot and glowing sun. Their multicolored flags with the Arabic symbols on them fluttered in the wind. The sky was full of black arrows and clouds of dirt. The dirt was kicked up high in the battle. Clanging swords and screams of men filled the air. The fighting was now hand-to-hand. Balian, Sergius, Edward, and Erik were in the ditch, fighting the Saracens. Father Gregory stood back a ways, reciting prayers.

Suddenly, Erik looked up and saw a burly rider on a horse come over the top of the rampart. He was a fierce looking man. Blood dripped from his sword, and there was a rage visible in his eyes, the kind of rage that struck fear into a man. Erik felt a lump form in his throat, and his arms went weak and tingly.

He recognized that face, all right. In fact, he would never forget it. It was the evil face of the heathen commander in Anatolia. He was the one responsible for the killing of that peaceful caravan; the one Erik was responsible for guarding.

Erik closed his eyes. He tried to get his fear under control. His hands were trembling. He marshaled his strength, grasped his sword tightly between the pommel and the hilt and said, "Lord Jesus, give me the strength! O saints, O angels, O high and mighty God of justice, let me be your avenger!"

At that moment, Sarim was in his glory. He loved killing infidels. He thought, *Surely Allah will give me a great reward in paradise for ridding the world of the heathens.*

Sarim had charged up onto the top of the ditch in a rage. He felt invincible. Suddenly, he saw a Varangian soldier leap up onto the top of the ditch with him. He breathed in deeply and prepared to attack him.

Erik leapt up atop the trench works. He grabbed the reigns of Sarim's horse and yanked it to the ground. Sarim went careening into the ditch below. He quickly jumped up, with the fire of hell in his eyes. He looked around and spotted Erik. In Latin he said, "You will die for that, Varangian!"

Sarim let out a blood-curdling scream. He charged at Erik, with his curved Arabian sword swinging wildly. Erik quickly swung his double-edged broadsword into action. He blocked the blows of the savage Mamluk. The two men then began to circle each other. Sarim attacked again, and managed to cut Erik's right forearm. His sharp curved sword had sliced through Erik's chain mail armor. Blood flowed from the wound. Erik cried out in pain and stepped back for a moment. When he recovered, he drew up all his strength and charged at Sarim. He swung his sword back and forth in broad strokes. Finally, one blow crashed through Sarim's block and smashed into Sarim's side, sending him crashing to the ground.

Sarim's Mamluk warriors saw him fall. They screamed loudly and unleashed a volley of arrows at Erik. He soon went down with several arrows in his chest.

Saladin looked up from his horse and saw Sarim go down. An arrow had also wounded his brother, Saphidin. Saladin knew he was losing his army at the ditch, so he reluctantly had the trumpeter sound the retreat. He looked down at the ground and said, "O Allah, I have failed you again! Acre is lost to the King of the heathens. The Lionhearted one has defeated me, as your messenger warned!"

Hospitaller

Saladin could see King Richard, sitting tall on his horse in the distance. He admired the skill of his new deadly foe. He knew he would have to be more cunning to beat the lionhearted king; however, Richard was the victor on this day, and he could do nothing to change that fact. Saladin turned back and returned to his camp.

Balian, Edward, and Sergius rushed to the side of Erik. His eyes were distant and glazed over. Blood ran from the corner of his mouth. Sergius cried out his name frantically—“Erik, Erik!”

Erik briefly turned his eyes and looked at him, and then he said, “At least Chloe will be amongst the honored widows now, my brother. Ha! I did not play dead this time. I really am dead, but at least I got that evil heathen.”

Erik drew in a deep breath and cried out, “Father Gregory!”

After that, Erik’s gaze drifted away into the distance forever. The people now counted him amongst the brave and honored soldiers.

Father Gregory rushed over to Erik and said the prayers of last rites over his body.

Sergius pulled the letter from Chloe out of Erik’s tunic. He opened it and read it.

“My Dear Erik, you do not have to be a hero. You do not have to die to prove you love me. Do not do anything foolish. Be safe and come home to me soon. Stay close to your friends—Sergius, Edward, and the Unknown—and I am sure you will make it back to me safely. They will watch your back. I love you!

Your dearest Chloe”

Sergius cried out. “Why, God? Why did Erik have to die...why not me instead? I am the murderer! He has done nothing wrong!”

Sergius walked away, weeping bitterly. There was not a dry eye amongst the brotherhood. The battle was now over at the ditch; but it still raged on at the tower.

Joseph Lessard

King Richard shouted, “Four gold bezants for every stone from yonder tower! I will give four gold bezants for every rock!”

A large swarm of Christians rushed the tower. They made several piles of stones before King Richard. So many knights, so many poor peasants, so many priests and lowly squires, the people of Christendom were working together to dismantle the mighty tower by hand. With a sudden cracking noise and a great cloud of dust, the tower came crashing down!

From atop his horse, King Richard saw it careen to the ground. He drew out his broadsword, and then he shouted to his army, “For God, for England, and for Christendom!”

Richard kicked his horse and charged forward to the wall. Fifty thousand knights followed his lead. When he reached the wall, he dismounted and bravely led his men through the breach where the tower had once stood.

Karakush and his men looked through the gaping hole where the tower had fallen. He saw the lionhearted king in his red tunic. Three gold lions were on the front of the tunic. They stood, one atop the other, in profile. Karakush feared this new Christian king with the lion as his symbol. One of his soldiers came to him and said, “Commander, the sultan and his army are retreating from the outer ditch of the Christian camp. We are all alone now.”

Karakush responded. “So--all is lost then. Sound the retreat to the inner tower. It is over. We will negotiate our surrender from there.”

As evening drew near, the Christians took over the city of Acre. There were about two thousand Moslem prisoners taken. They locked them up in several dungeons around the city. English and French soldiers placed their flags atop the walls of Acre, and then an Austrian soldier put an Austrian flag alongside the other two. King Richard’s men quickly ripped it down and threw it into the ditch below. They felt that the Austrians had contributed little to the taking of Acre. They tussled with the Austrian soldiers as they tried to return the flag to the

Hospitaller

battlements. They also hurled insults at them about the duke, questioning his bravery.

Duke Leopold of Austria went to Richard and protested these actions, but he ignored him. Richard was not a good politician. The next day, Leopold took five thousand of his knights, along with several hundred Germans, and left for home. This insult would come back to haunt Richard. Not only had he lost the men, but he had also created an enemy.

Soon the Christians had removed their armor and opened the taverns and places of prostitution in Acre. They were tired of the siege and ready for some fun. Surely, God would allow them a little indulgence for all their sacrifice at the wall.

King Richard settled into a room in the Hospitaller fortress in Acre. Then he called for the Unknown, Sir Balian, and Sir Jonathan to come to him. He said to them,

“You men have done a great service to God, your king, and the cause of the cross. I want you to stay nearby as my advisors.”

The Unknown cleared his throat and spoke up, “My king, as your advisor I am going to ask you a question... Do you think it is wise to allow your men to insult Duke Leopold? Surely we will need his men in the fight for Jerusalem.”

King Richard scratched thoughtfully at his goatee and replied, “He only had a few thousand men. They did not contribute much. What they have done is done and over with. My men feel justified in their actions. They sacrificed the most. Let Leopold go. He is not that significant.”

The Unknown could not believe the king’s ambivalence. He pressed on.

“My king, we will need every sword we have against Saladin.”

King Richard was unmoved. He held up his hand. “Enough!” He waved his personal guard over to him and whispered into his ear. He looked back at the Unknown, and said, “Excuse me, gentlemen. It has

been a long day. I must take some refreshment, and then some rest. Please come back tomorrow morning.”

As the men left the tent, Balian said to the Unknown,

“Our king is a mighty warrior, but a very poor politician. We have much work to do to keep him safe and out of trouble.”

The Unknown replied thoughtfully, “Indeed we do, my friend.”

All the noble women gathered in a large well-guarded tent. There was a lot of busy talk inside. Queen Isabella of Jerusalem was wearing a long white flowing gown. She also had on a fine golden tiara. It was the sign of her station as Queen of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. She spoke with Phoebe and her mother, Maria Comenus, and Sheba, Phoebe’s maidservant, while several of her own maidservants attended to her.

“Everyone in the camp is talking about your man, the brave Unknown Knight. He has done a very inspiring and brave deed. The king and this army all owe him a debt of gratitude.”

Phoebe glowed with pride at the actions of her man.

“Thank you, Your Highness. He told me he had been sent here by an inspired vision to make a difference. Until today, I was not sure he knew what he was to do.”

“He did it today, and did it quite well. With King Richard and men like Sir Balian and the Unknown on our side, we will soon take back Jerusalem too.”

“I hope we do, Your Highness. Then we can all rest for a while. I do not like war and all its killing. I know it is a necessary thing, though, if we are to survive the Moslem incursions into Christian lands.”

From the other side of the tent, the Byzantine princess looked nervously around. The tent had plenty of light, due to several bronze multi-candled lamp stands. She could see Queen Berengaria of England talking to Maria Comenus, Queen Isabella, and the others. A tingle of nervousness worked its way up her spine, and her arms began to go

Hospitaller

weak and numb. Beads of sweat began to appear and shine on the copper skin of her forehead. The dark hair of her bangs showed signs of dampness from the sweat. Queen Berengaria walked toward her; the princess swallowed nervously. She felt as though she were in a trance—a horrible nightmarish trance, from which there was no escape. Then the queen addressed her.

“Hello, Princess. It has been quite an eventful day. Soon Richard will send for one of us. He will surely want to celebrate his victory. I wonder... which one of us he will choose.”

Berengaria looked at the princess with a cold, stern, stoic stare. The princess was quite fearful for her very life, despite Berengaria’s promise that she would not harm her. She replied tepidly, “I do not know, Your Highness. I do hope he chooses you, though. I did not ask to be caught up in this triangle.”

“Ah, but caught up you are. Whether you chose to or not, you are involved. Remember, I do not blame you though, Princess. I blame Richard for this. He is the one who will have to answer to God for this sin.”

Suddenly, there was an interruption at the tent entrance. It was Richard’s personal bodyguard. No doubt, they had come for one of the woman.

“Excuse us, ladies. We have come on orders from the king.”

Queen Berengaria tartly responded, “Do not just stand there guard. Whom have you come for? We are all noble ladies here, so I suggest you get to it, and do not keep us waiting!”

“Yes, my lady,” the guard quickly replied.

The soldier, in his armor and red tunic, slowly looked around the tent. He spotted the one he was looking for. He walked over and addressed her. “Princess, please come with me. The king requires your company.”

Berengaria looked down while the princess and the guard left the tent. The young princess also looked down on her way out. She could

Joseph Lessard

not bear to look Berengaria in the eye. The shame of all of this was far too much for her. Joan, who was King Richard's sister, went over to comfort the Queen of England. Isabella, the Queen of Jerusalem, quickly joined them. Phoebe, Sheba, and Maria Comenus also came over to offer their comfort. Kings, queens, and concubines—the life of a royal could be far more complicated than peasants ever imagined.

Berengaria slowly pulled away from her comforters. She left the tent alone, holding her head up proudly and stoically on the way out. When she was away from the others, she wept uncontrollably.

Hospitaller

“Do not be surprised that you fall everyday; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously, and assuredly, the angel who guards you will honor your patience.”

Saint John the Ladder

Hospitaller is the epic tale of a knight persecuted at home. He receives a vision from an angel telling him to "take the cross." On pilgrimage, he meets knights, ladies, peasants, a king and a sultan and affects them all.

Hospitaller: A Tale Of The Unknown Knight In The Third Crusade

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/3377.html?s=pdf>