

Chapter Thirteen: The Embassy

The brethren and Rosamund looked at each other, for having so much to say it seemed that they could not speak at all. Then with a low cry Rosamund said:

"Oh! let us thank God, Who, after all these black months of travel and of danger, has thus brought us together again," and, kneeling down there together in the guest-hall of the lord of Death, they gave thanks earnestly. Then, moving to the centre of the chamber where they thought that none would hear them, they began to speak in low voices and in English.

"Tell you your tale first, Rosamund," said Godwin.

She told it as shortly as she could, they listening without a word.

Then Godwin spoke and told her theirs. Rosamund heard it, and asked a question almost in a whisper.

"Why does that beautiful dark-eyed woman befriend you?"

"I do not know," answered Godwin, "unless it is because of the accident of my having saved her from the lion."

Rosamund looked at him and smiled a little, and Wulf smiled also.

Then she said:

"Blessings be on that lion and all its tribe! I pray that she may not soon forget the deed, for it seems that our lives hang upon her favour. How strange is this story, and how desperate our case! How strange also that you should have come on hither against her counsel, which, seeing what we have, I think was honest?"

"We were led," answered Godwin. "Your father had wisdom at his death, and saw what we could not see."

"Ay," added Wulf, "but I would that it had been into some other place, for I fear this lord Al-je-bal at whose nod men hurl themselves to death."

"He is hateful," answered Rosamund, with a shudder; "worse even than the knight Lozelle; and when he fixes his eyes on me, my heart grows sick. Oh! that we could escape this place!"

"An eel in an osier trap has more chance of freedom," said Wulf gloomily. "Let us at least be thankful that we are caged together--for how long, I wonder?"

As he spoke Masouda appeared, attended by waiting women, and,

bowing to Rosamund, said:

"It is the will of the Master, lady, that I lead you to the chambers that have been made ready for you, there to rest until the hour of the feast. Fear not; you shall meet your brethren then. You knights have leave, if it so pleases you, to exercise your horses in the gardens. They stand saddled in the courtyard, to which this woman will bring you," and she pointed to one of those two maids who had cleaned the armour, "and with them are guides and an escort."

"She means that we must go," muttered Godwin, adding aloud, "farewell, sister, until tonight."

So they parted, unwillingly enough. In the courtyard they found the horses, Flame and Smoke, as they had been told, also a mounted escort of four fierce-looking fedais and an officer. When they were in the saddle, this man, motioning to them to follow him, passed by an archway out of the courtyard into the gardens. Hence ran a broad road strewn with sand, along which he began to gallop. This road followed the gulf which encircled the citadel and inner town of Masyaf, that was, as it were, an island on a mountain top with a circumference of over three miles.

As they went, the gulf always on their right hand, holding in their horses to prevent their passing that of their guide, swift

as it was, they saw another troop approaching them. This was also preceded by an officer of the Assassins, as these servants of Al-je-bal were called by the Franks, and behind him, mounted on a splendid coalblack steed and followed by guards, rode a mail-clad Frankish knight.

"It is Lozelle," said Wulf, "upon the horse that Sinan promised him."

At the sight of the man a fury took hold of Godwin. With a shout of warning he drew his sword. Lozelle saw, and out leapt his blade in answer. Then sweeping past the officers who were with them and reining up their steeds, in a second they were face to face. Lozelle struck first and Godwin caught the stroke upon his buckler, but before he could return it the fedais of either party rushed between them and thrust them asunder.

"A pity," said Godwin, as they dragged his horse away. "Had they left us alone I think, brother, I might have saved you a moonlight duel."

"That I do not want to miss, but the chance at his head was good if those fellows would have let you take it," answered Wulf reflectively.

Then the horses began to gallop again, and they saw no more of

Lozelle. Now, skirting the edge of the town, they came to the narrow, wall-less bridge that spanned the gulf between it and the outer gate and city. Here the officer wheeled his horse, and, beckoning to them to follow, charged it at full gallop. After him went the brethren--Godwin first, then Wulf. In the deep gateway on the further side they reined up. The captain turned, and began to gallop back faster than he had come--as fast, indeed, as his good beast would travel.

"Pass him!" cried Godwin, and shaking the reins loose upon the neck of Flame he called to it aloud.

Forward it sprang, with Smoke at its heels. Now they had overtaken the captain, and now even on that narrow way they had swept past him. Not an inch was there to spare between them and the abyss, and the man, brave as he was, expecting to be thrust to death, clung to his horse's mane with terror in his eyes. On the city side the brethren pulled up laughing among the astonished fedais who had waited for them there.

"By the Signet," cried the officer, thinking that the knights could not understand, "these are not men; they are devils, and their horses are goats of the mountains. I thought to frighten them, but it is I who was frightened, for they swept past me like eagles of the air."

"Gallant riders and swift, well-trained steeds," answered one of the fedais, with admiration in his voice. "The fight at the full moon will be worth our seeing."

Then once more they took the sand-strewn road and galloped on. Thrice they passed round the city thus, the last time by themselves, for the captain and the fedais were far outstripped. Indeed it was not until they had unsaddled Flame and Smoke in their stalls that these appeared, spurring their foaming horses. Taking no heed of them, the brethren thrust aside the grooms, dressed their steeds down, fed and watered them.

Then having seen them eat, there being no more to do, they walked back to the guest-house, hoping to find Rosamund. But they found no Rosamund, so sat down together and talked of the wonderful things that had befallen them, and of what might befall them in the future; of the mercy of Heaven also which had brought them all three together safe and sound, although it was in this house of hell. So the time passed on, till about the hour of sunset the women servants came and led them to the bath, where the black slaves washed and perfumed them, clothing them in fresh robes above their armour.

When they came out the sun was down, and the women, bearing torches in their hands, conducted them to a great and gorgeous hall which they had not seen before, built of fretted stone and

having a carved and painted roof. Along one side of this hall, that was lit with cressets, were a number of round-headed open arches supported by elegant white columns, and beyond these a marble terrace with flights of steps which led to the gardens beneath. On the floor of this hall, each seated upon his cushion beside low tables inlaid with pearl sat the guests, a hundred or more, all dressed in white robes on which the red dagger was blazoned, and all as silent as though they were asleep.

When the brethren reached the place the women left them, and servants with gold chains round their necks escorted them to a dais in the middle of the hall where were many cushions, as yet unoccupied, arranged in a semicircle, of which the centre was a divan higher and more gorgeous than the rest.

Here places were pointed out to them opposite the divan, and they took their stand by them. They had not long to wait, for presently there was a sound of music, and, heralded by troops of singing women, the lord Sinan approached, walking slowly down the length of the great hall. It was a strange procession, for after the women came the aged, white robed dais, then the lord Al-je-bal himself, clad now in his blood-red, festal robe, and wearing jewels on his turban.

Around him marched four slaves, black as ebony, each of whom held a flaming torch on high, while behind followed the two gigantic

guards who had stood sentry over him when he sat under the canopy of justice. As he advanced down the hall every man in it rose and prostrated himself, and so remained until their lord was seated, save only the two brethren, who stood erect like the survivors among the slain of a battle. Settling himself among the cushions at one end of the divan, he waved his hand, whereon the feasters, and with them Godwin and Wulf, sat themselves down.

Now there was a pause, while Sinan glanced along the hall impatiently. Soon the brethren saw why, since at the end opposite to that by which he had entered appeared more singing women, and after them, also escorted by four black torch-bearers, only these were women, walked Rosamund and, behind her, Masouda.

Rosamund it was without doubt, but Rosamund transformed, for now she seemed an Eastern queen. Round her head was a coronet of gems from which hung a veil, but not so as to hide her face. Jewelled, too, were her heavy plaits of hair, jewelled the rose-silk garments that she wore, the girdle at her waist, her naked, ivory arms and even the slippers on her feet. As she approached in her royal-looking beauty all the guests at that strange feast stared first at her and next at each other. Then as though by a single impulse they rose and bowed.

"What can this mean?" muttered Wulf to Godwin as they did likewise. But Godwin made no answer.

On came Rosamund, and now, behold! the lord Al-je-bal rose also and, giving her his hand, seated her by him on the divan.

"Show no surprise, Wulf," muttered Godwin, who had caught a warning look in the eyes of Masouda as she took up her position behind Rosamund.

Now the feast began. Slaves running to and fro, set dish after dish filled with strange and savoury meats, upon the little inlaid tables, those that were served to Sinan and his guests fashioned, all of them, of silver or of gold.

Godwin and Wulf ate, though not for hunger's sake, but of what they ate they remembered nothing who were watching Sinan and straining their ears to catch all he said without seeming to take note or listen. Although she strove to hide it and to appear indifferent, it was plain to them that Rosamund was much afraid. Again and again Sinan presented to her choice morsels of food, sometimes on the dishes and sometimes with his fingers, and these she was obliged to take. All the while also he devoured her with his fierce eyes so that she shrank away from him to the furthest limit of the divan.

Then wine, perfumed and spiced, was brought in golden cups, of which, having drunk, he offered to Rosamund. But she shook her

head and asked Masouda for water, saying that she touched nothing stronger, and it was given her, cooled with snow. The brethren asked for water also, whereon Sinan looked at them suspiciously and demanded the reason. Godwin replied through Masouda that they were under an oath to touch no wine till they returned to their own country, having fulfilled their mission. To this he answered meaningly that it was good and right to keep oaths, but he feared that theirs would make them water-drinkers for the rest of their lives, a saying at which their hearts sank.

Now the wine that he had drunk took hold of Sinan, and he began to talk who without it was so silent.

"You met the Frank Lozelle to-day," he said to Godwin, through Masouda, "when riding in my gardens, and drew your sword on him. Why did you not kill him? Is he the better man?"

"It seems not, as once before I worsted him and I sit here unhurt, lord," answered Godwin. "Your servants thrust between and separated us."

"Ay," replied Sinan, "I remember; they had orders. Still, I would that you had killed him, the unbelieving dog, who has dared to lift his eyes to this Rose of Roses, your sister. Fear not," he went on, addressing Rosamund, "he shall offer you no more insult, who are henceforth under the protection of the Signet," and

stretching out his thin, cruel-looking hand, on which gleamed the ring of power, he patted her on the arm.

All of these things Masouda translated, while Rosamund dropped her head to hide her face, though on it were not the blushes that he thought, but loathing and alarm.

Wulf glared at the Al-je-bal, whose head by good fortune was turned away, and so fierce was the rage swelling in his heart that a mist seemed to gather before his eyes, and through it this devilish chief of a people of murderers, clothed in his robe of flaming red, looked like a man steeped in blood. The thought came to him suddenly that he would make him what he looked, and his hand passed to his sword-hilt. But Godwin saw the terror in Masouda's eyes, saw Wulf's hand also, and guessed what was about to chance. With a swift movement of his arm he struck a golden dish from the table to the marble floor, then said, in a clear voice in French:

"Brother, be not so awkward; pick up that dish and answer the lord Sinan as is your right--I mean, touching the matter of Lozelle."

Wulf stooped to obey, and his mind cleared which had been so near to madness.

"I wish it not, lord," he said, "who, if I can, have your good leave to slay this fellow on the third night from now. If I fail, then let my brother take my place, but not before."

"Yes, I forgot," said Sinan. "So I decreed, and that will be a fight I wish to see. If he kills you then your brother shall meet him. And if he kills you both, then perhaps I, Sinan, will meet him--in my own fashion. Sweet lady, knowing where the course is laid, say, do you fear to see this fray?"

Rosamund's face paled, but she answered proudly:

"Why should I fear what my brethren do not fear? They are brave knights, bred to arms, and God, in Whose hand are all our destinies--even yours, O Lord of Death--He will guard the right."

When this speech was translated to him Sinan quailed a little. Then he answered:

"Lady, know that I am the Voice and Prophet of Allah--ay, and his sword to punish evil-doers and those who do not believe. Well, if what I hear is true, your brethren are skilled horsemen who even dared to pass my servant on the narrow bridge, so victory may rest with them. Tell me which of them do you love the least, for he shall first face the sword of Lozelle."

Now as Rosamund prepared herself to answer Masouda scanned her face through her half-closed eyes. But whatever she may have felt within, it remained calm and cold as though it were cut in stone.

"To me they are as one man," she said. "When one speaks, both speak. I love them equally."

"Then, Guest of my heart, it shall go as I have said. Brother Blue-eyes shall fight first, and if he falls then Brother Grey-eyes. The feast is ended, and it is my hour for prayer. Slaves, bid the people fill their cups. Lady, I pray of you, stand forward on the dais."

She obeyed, and at a sign the black slave-women gathered behind her with their flaming torches. Then Sinan rose also, and cried with a loud voice:

"Servants of Al-je-bal, pledge, I command you, this Flower of flowers, the high-born Princess of Baalbec, the niece of the Sultan, Salah-ed-din, whom men call the Great," and he sneered, "though he be not so great as I, this Queen of maids who soon--" Then, checking himself, he drank off his wine, and with a low bow presented the empty, jewelled cup to Rosamund. All the company drank also, and shouted till the hall rang, for her loveliness as she stood thus in the fierce light of the torches, aflame as

these men were with the vision-breeding wine of Al-je-bal, moved them to madness.

"Queen! Queen!" they shouted. "Queen of our Master and of us all!"

Sinan heard and smiled. Then, motioning for silence, he took the hand of Rosamund, kissed it, and turning, passed from the hall preceded by his singing women and surrounded by the dais and guards.

Godwin and Wulf stepped forward to speak with Rosamund, but Masouda interposed herself between them, saying in a cold, clear voice:

"It is not permitted. Go, knights, and cool your brows in yonder garden, where sweet water runs. Your sister is my charge. Fear not, for she is guarded."

"Come," said Godwin to Wulf; "we had best obey."

So together they walked through the crowd of those feasters that remained, for most of them had already left the hall, who made way, not without reverence, for the brethren of this new star of beauty, on to the terrace, and from the terrace into the gardens. Here they stood awhile in the sweet freshness of the night, which

was very grateful after the heated, perfume-laden air of the banquet; then began to wander up and down among the scented trees and flowers. The moon, floating in a cloudless sky, was almost at its full, and by her light they saw a wondrous scene. Under many of the trees and in tents set about here and there, rugs were spread, and to them came men who had drunk of the wine of the feast, and cast themselves down to sleep.

"Are they drunk?" asked Wulf.

"It would seem so," answered Godwin.

Yet these men appeared to be mad rather than drunk, for they walked steadily enough, but with wide-set, dreamy eyes; nor did they seem to sleep upon the rugs, but lay there staring at the sky and muttering with their lips, their faces steeped in a strange, unholy rapture. Sometimes they would rise and walk a few paces with outstretched arms, till the arms closed as though they clasped something invisible, to which they bent their heads to babble awhile. Then they walked back to their rugs again, where they remained silent.

As they lay thus, white-veiled women appeared, who crouched by the heads of these sleepers, murmuring into their ears, and when from time to time they sat up, gave them to drink from cups they carried, after partaking of which they lay down again and became

quite senseless.

Only the women would move on to others and serve them likewise. Some of them approached the brethren with a slow, gliding motion, and offered them the cup; but they walked forward, taking no notice, whereupon the girls left them, laughing softly, and saying such things as "Tomorrow we shall meet," or "Soon you will be glad to drink and enter into Paradise."

"When the time comes doubtless we shall be glad, who have dwelt here," answered Godwin gravely, but as he spoke in French they did not understand him.

"Step out, brother," said Wulf, "for at the very sight of those rugs I grow sleepy, and the wine in the cups sparkles as bright as their bearers' eyes."

So they walked on towards the sound of a waterfall, and, when they came to it, drank, and bathed their faces and heads.

"This is better than their wine," said Wulf. Then, catching sight of more women flitting round them, looking like ghosts amid the moonlit glades, they pressed forward till they reached an open sward where there were no rugs, no sleepers, and no cupbearers.

"Now," said Wulf, halting, "tell me what does all this mean?"

"Are you deaf and blind?" asked Godwin. "Cannot you see that yonder fiend is in love with Rosamund, and means to take her, as he well may do?"

Wulf groaned aloud, then answered: "I swear that first I will send his soul to hell, even though our own must keep it company."

"Ay," answered Godwin, "I saw; you went near to it tonight. But remember, that is the end for all of us. Let us wait then to strike until we must--to save her from worse things."

"Who knows that we may find another chance? Meanwhile, meanwhile--" and again he groaned.

"Among those ornaments that hung about the waist of Rosamund I saw a jewelled knife," answered Godwin, sadly. "She can be trusted to use it if need be, and after that we can be trusted to do our worst. At least, I think that we should die in a fashion that would be remembered in this mountain."

As they spoke they had loitered towards the edge of the glade, and halting there stood silent, till presently from under the shadow of a cedar tree appeared a solitary, white robed woman.

"Let us be going," said Wulf; "here is another of them with her accursed cup."

But before they could turn the woman glided up to them and suddenly unveiled. It was Masouda.

"Follow me, brothers Peter and John," she said in a laughing whisper. "I have words to say to you. What! you will not drink? Well, it is wisest." And emptying the cup upon the ground she flitted ahead of them.

Silently as a wraith she went, now appearing in the open spaces, now vanishing, beneath the dense gloom of cedar boughs, till she reached a naked, lonely rock which stood almost upon the edge of the gulf. Opposite to this rock was a great mound such as ancient peoples reared over the bodies of their dead, and in the mound, cunningly hidden by growing shrubs, a massive door.

Masouda took a key from her girdle, and, having looked around to see that they were alone, unlocked it.

"Enter," she said, pushing them before her. They obeyed, and through the darkness within heard her close the door.

"Now we are safe awhile," she said with a sigh, "or, at least, so I think. But I will lead you to where there is more light."

Then, taking each of them by the hand, she went forward along a smooth incline, till presently they saw the moonlight, and by it discovered that they stood at the mouth of a cave which was fringed with bushes. Running up from the depths of the gulf below to this opening was a ridge or shoulder of rock, very steep and narrow.

"See the only road that leads from the citadel of Masyaf save that across the bridge," said Masouda.

"A bad one," answered Wulf, staring downward.

"Ay, yet horses trained to rocks can follow it. At its foot is the bottom of the gulf, and a mile or more away to the left a deep cleft which leads to the top of the mountain and to freedom. Will you not take it now? By tomorrow's dawn you might be far away."

"And where would the lady Rosamund be?" asked Wulf.

"In the harem of the lord Sinan--that is, very soon," she answered, coolly.

"Oh, say it not!" he exclaimed, clasping her arm, while Godwin leaned back against the wall of the cave.

"Why should I hide the truth? Have you no eyes to see that he is enamoured of her loveliness--like others? Listen; a while ago my master Sinan chanced to lose his queen--how, we need not ask, but it is said that she wearied him. Now, as he must by law, he mourns for her a month, from full moon to full moon. But on the day after the full moon--that is, the third morning from now--he may wed again, and I think there will be a marriage. Till then, however, your sister is as safe as though she yet sat at home in England before Salah-ed-din dreamed his dream."

"Therefore," said Godwin, "within that time she must either escape or die."

"There is a third way," answered Masouda, shrugging her shoulders. "She might stay and become the wife of Sinan."

Wulf muttered something between his teeth, then stepped towards her threateningly, saying:

"Rescue her, or--"

"Stand back, pilgrim John," she said, with a laugh. "If I rescue her, which indeed would be hard, it will not be for fear of your great sword."

"What, then, will avail, Masouda?" asked Godwin in a sad voice.

"To promise you money would be useless, even if we could."

"I am glad that you spared me that insult," she replied with flashing eyes, "for then there had been an end. Yet," she added more humbly, "seeing my home and business, and what I appear to be," and she glanced at her dress and the empty cup in her hand, "it had not been strange. Now hear me, and forget no word. At present you are in favour with Sinan, who believes you to be the brothers of the lady Rosamund, not her lovers; but from the moment he learns the truth your doom is sealed. Now what the Frank Lozelle knows, that the Al-je-bal may know at any time--and will know, if these should meet.

"Meanwhile, you are free; so to-morrow, while you ride about the garden, as you will do, take note of the tall rock that stands without, and how to reach it from any point, even in the dark. To-morrow, also, when the moon is up, they will lead you to the narrow bridge, to ride your horses to and fro there, that they may learn not to fear it in that light. When you have stabled them go into the gardens and come hither unobserved, as the place being so far away you can do. The guards will let you pass, thinking only that you desire to drink a cup of wine with some fair friend, as is the custom of our guests. Enter this cave--here is the key," and she handed it to Wulf, "and if I be not there, await me. Then I will tell you my plan, if I have any,

but until then I must scheme and think. Now it grows late--go."

"And you, Masouda," said Godwin, doubtfully; "how will you escape this place?"

"By a road you do not know of, for I am mistress of the secrets of this city. Still, I thank you for your thought of me. Go, I say, and lock the door behind you."

So they went in silence, doing as she bade them, and walked back through the gardens, that now seemed empty enough, to the stable-entrance of the guest-house, where the guards admitted them without question.

That night the brethren slept together in one bed, fearing that if they lay separate they might be searched in their sleep and not awake. Indeed, it seemed to them that, as before, they heard footsteps and voices in the darkness.

Next morning, when they had breakfasted, they loitered awhile, hoping to win speech with Rosamund, or sight of her, or at the least that Masouda would come to them; but they saw no Rosamund, and no Masouda came. At length an officer appeared, and beckoned to them to follow him. So they followed, and were led through the halls and passages to the terrace of justice, where Sinan, clad in his black robe, sat as before beneath a canopy in the midst of

the sun-lit marble floor. There, too, beside him, also beneath the canopy and gorgeously apparelled, sat Rosamund. They strove to advance and speak with her, but guards came between them, pointing out a place where they must stand a few yards away. Only Wulf said in a loud voice, in English:

"Tell us, Rosamund, is it well with you?" Lifting her pale face, she smiled and nodded.

Then, at the bidding of Sinan, Masouda commanded them to be silent, saying that it was not lawful for them to speak to the Lord of the Mountain, or his Companion, unless they were first bidden so to do. So, having learnt what they wished to know, they were silent.

Now some of the dais drew near the canopy, and consulted with their master on what seemed to be a great matter, for their faces were troubled. Presently he gave an order, whereon they resumed their seats and messengers left the terrace. When they appeared again, in their company were three noble-looking Saracens, who were accompanied by a retinue of servants and wore green turbans, showing that they were descendants of the Prophet. These men, who seemed weary with long travel, marched up the terrace with a proud mien, not looking at the dais or any one until they saw the brethren standing side by side, at whom they stared a little.

Next they caught sight of Rosamund sitting in the shadow of the canopy, and bowed to her, but of the Al-je-bal they took no notice.

"Who are you, and what is your pleasure?" asked Sinan, after he had eyed them awhile. "I am the ruler of this country. These are my ministers," and he pointed to the dais, "and here is my sceptre," and he touched the bloodred dagger broidered on his robe of black.

Now that Sinan had declared himself the embassy bowed to him, courteously enough. Then their spokesman answered him.

"That sceptre we know; it has been seen afar. Twice already we have cut down its bearers even in the tent of our master. Lord of Murder, we acknowledge the emblem of murder, and we bow to you whose title is the Great Murderer. As for our mission, it is this. We are the ambassadors of Salah-ed-din, Commander of the Faithful, Sultan of the East; in these papers signed with his signet are our credentials, if you would read them."

"So," answered Sinan, "I have heard of that chief. What is his will with me?"

"This, Al-je-bal. A Frank in your pay, and a traitor, has betrayed to you a certain lady, niece of Salah-ed-din, the

princess of Baalbec, whose father was a Frankish noble named D'Arcy, and who herself is named Rose of the World. The Sultan, Salah-ed-din, having been informed of this matter by his servant, the prince Hassan, who escaped from your soldiers, demands that this lady, his niece, be delivered to him forthwith, and with her the head of the Frank Lozelle."

"The head of the Frank Lozelle he may have if he will after to-morrow night. The lady I keep," snarled Sinan.

"What then?"

"Then, Al-je-bal, in the name of Salah-ed-din, we declare war on you--war till this high place of yours is pulled stone from stone; war till your tribe be dead, till the last man, woman, and child be slain, until your carcass is tossed to the crows to feed on."

Now Sinan rose in fury and rent at his beard.

"Go back," he said, "and tell that dog you name a sultan, that low as he is, the humble-born son of Ayoub, I, Al-je-bal, do him an honour that he does not observe. My queen is dead, and two days from now, when my month of mourning is expired, I shall take to wife his niece, the princess of Baalbec, who sits here beside me, my bride-elect."

At these words Rosamund, who had been listening intently, started like one who has been stung by a snake, put her hands before her face and groaned.

"Princess," said the ambassador, who was watching her, "you seem to understand our language; is this your will, to mate your noble blood with that of the heretic chief of the Assassins ?"

"Nay, nay!" she cried. "It is no will of mine, who am a helpless prisoner and by faith a Christian. If my uncle Salah-ed-din is indeed as great as I have heard, then let him show his power and deliver me, and with me these my brethren, the knights Sir Godwin and Sir Wulf."

"So you speak Arabic," said Sinan. "Good; our loving converse will be easier, and for the rest--well, the whims of women change. Now, you messengers of Salah-ed-din, begone, lest I send you on a longer journey, and tell your master that if he dares to lift his standards against my walls my fedais shall speak with him. By day and by night, not for one moment shall he be safe. Poison shall lurk in his cup and a dagger in his bed. Let him kill a hundred of them, and another hundred shall appear. His most trusted guards shall be his executioners. The women in his harem shall bring him to his doom--ay, death shall be in the very air he breathes. If he would escape it, therefore, let him hide

himself within the walls of his city of Damascus, or amuse himself with wars against the mad Cross-worshippers, and leave me to live in peace with this lady whom I have chosen."

"Great words, worthy of the Great Assassin," said the ambassador.

"Great words in truth, which shall be followed by great deeds.

What chance has this lord of yours against a nation sworn to obey to the death? You smile? Then come hither you--and you." And he summoned two of his dais by name.

They rose and bowed before him.

"Now, my worthy servants," he said, "show these heretic dogs how you obey, that their master may learn the power of your master. You are old and weary of life. Begone, and await me in Paradise."

The old men bowed again, trembling a little. Then, straightening themselves, without a word they ran side by side and leapt into the abyss.

"Has Salah-ed-din servants such as these?" asked Sinan in the silence that followed. "Well, what they have done, all would do, if I bid them slay him. Back, now; and, if you will, take these Franks with you, who are my guests, that they may bear witness of what you have seen, and of the state in which you left their

sister. Translate to the knights, woman."

So Masouda translated. Then Godwin answered through her.

"We understand little of this matter, who are ignorant of your tongue, but, O Al-je-bal, ere we leave your sheltering roof we have a quarrel to settle with the man Lozelle. After that, with your permission, we will go, but not before."

Now Rosamund sighed as if in relief, and Sinan answered:

"As you will; so be it," adding, "Give these envoys food and drink before they go."

But their spokesman answered: "We partake not of the bread and salt of murderers, lest we should become of their fellowship.

Al-je-bal, we depart, but within a week we appear again in the company of ten thousand spears, and on one of them shall your head be set. Your safe-conduct guards us till the sunset. After that, do your worst, as we do ours. High Princess, our counsel to you is that you slay yourself and so gain immortal honour."

Then, bowing to her one by one, they turned and marched down the terrace followed by their servants.

Now Sinan waved his hand and the court broke up, Rosamund leaving

it first, accompanied by Masouda and escorted by guards, after which the brethren were commanded to depart also.

So they went, talking earnestly of all these things, but save in God finding no hope at all.