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Leopards Are for England

by
H. BEDFORD-JONES

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*That malign and magic jewel, the Sphinx Emerald comes on the scene to play its part
in a stirring drama of the Crusades.*

The man in the tent was bull-necked, of massive build yet not too short, his features alight with keen intelligence. Except for a long mustache, he was clean-shaven. The fiery energy manifest in him was amazing; yet he was ill now, and had long been ill. His voice, rapidly dictating, broke now and again with impatience; he was a person of astounding power but scarcely of poise. He wore a single cool, armless garment that came to his knees and was ornamented with the heraldic device of a lion—the Lion of Flanders, in fact. Despite the afternoon breeze off the sea, the heat was intense and deadly.

“That will do,” he concluded curtly. “Now I want Fitzalan—Sir James Fitzalan.”

The two secretaries, one French, one Arab, departed. The man went to the tent entrance, wide open for air, and stared out. He was barely thirty-five, hard-muscled, alert. He looked at the sandy curve of shore a quarter-mile distant toward the city. Tents, huts, shelters backed it; men by the hundred were in the water or lolling naked on the sand.

Moving outside a little, the man turned and gazed in the other direction. Here was a tremendous plain running into the eastern horizon, dotted here and there with trees, with oleander bushes in gay flower, but showing hereabouts no sign of life. This was part of the historic Plain of Esdrælon, lying between Askalon and St. Jean d’Acre—a plain that had been repeatedly, from historic times, flushed with the blood of armies, the deceptively easy-looking plain that led into Palestine.

Squinting into the distance, the man found what he sought—a mere glint of light. It was there day and night, a glint that came from sun or moon on helm and shield: a pin-prick of reflected radiance, cruel and terrible, merciless emblem of Asia. This corner of naked plain was hemmed in by the united forces of all hither Asia and Egypt. For the first time in history, the Arab people had no divisions and were united in a *jihad*, a holy war against the Christian, under one leader who was superb and unconquerable.

Another man came from the horse-camp to the tent, a younger man with worn features, deep straight eyes, hollow cheeks. The armed guards saluted him; like them, he wore a small cross on the right shoulder of his mantle, tokening the Crusader. The big man in the entrance smiled; with warming, kindling gaze he took the newcomer by the arm and turned into the tent with him.

“Holá, Fitzalan! Did the swim help you?”

“It put new life into me, sire. I’m practically cured of fever, anyhow.”

“A many have been cured for eternity. I have an errand for you.”

“As many as Your Majesty desires.”

“Oh, bosh! Stop that damned formal speech. You remind me of my Arab scribe, always prating *Melek el Anketar* at me—King of Angletterre indeed! By God, I’m Richard Plantagenet, and no fancy strutting peacock! Sit down, stretch out, be comfortable.”

Fitzalan complied, smiling. Four years of war had hardened him, aged him, left him very tired and hopeless. The old fine fervor had gone long ago. He was sunk in a morass of failure, treachery, death; so were they all.

Sounds of laughter and shrill vituperation brought him erect. He looked out. A boy, detained by the guards, was furiously cursing them in French, Arabic and the lingua franca commonly employed by the army. King Richard was laughing heartily at the storm of oaths.

“Yusef! Be quiet!” snapped Fitzalan. “Go away. Wait for me by the shore.” He resumed his seat on the cushions. “It’s that confounded town boy who plays at being my esquire. A smart lad, in truth, but a nuisance at times.”

The King nodded. “Aye, I heard how you saved his life and won yourself a devoted servant. You’re a lucky dog, Fitzalan. Well, what news from my coat with the new arms?”

Lightly Fitzalan answered: “The ladies are finishing the broidery, sire; but everyone swears the animals are weird and unearthly. If you change your blazon from the Flanders Lion to these three nonsense creatures, your good Blondel says all the French heralds will lose their wits!”

King Richard cursed softly. Blondel was attending the Queen in the city just now. Pretending to be a minstrel, he had learned the trick. In reality he was an expert swordsman and a bodyguard.

“I know more about blazonry than all the heralds in France! So does any educated Saracen. Heraldry is purely an Eastern art; we’re bringing back from the Crusades what will some day become a science. . . . Well, well, let it pass. If you’re fit to ride, go find this infidel Sultan for me.”

“Easily done.” Surprised though he was, Fitzalan agreed impassively. “That Saracen outpost is in plain sight. Whether we seek single combat, friendly intercourse or diplomatic usage, the outpost is at our service.”

The bull-necked man grunted. “They are the polite, soft-spoken bastards—but by my father King Harry, how they can fight, eh!” He licked his lips appreciatively. Then his mood changed. The fire died from his eyes. A sad crafty expression came into his face.

“I’m sending you because I can trust no one else. Spies watch us all day and night, so be careful. Also, it may give you a chance to investigate your brother’s affairs. I have only one item of instruction for you: Speak only with Saladin himself, and speak the exact truth. No lies.”

A simple knight of the royal household and no herald, Fitzalan listened in growing amazement as the King went on:

“Our supplies are about done; our money’s gone; no more help is coming this year. Philip of France and Austrian Leopold have gone home. I’ve taken Askalon and Acre from Saladin; he’s taken all the inland places from me. We hold the coast; he holds Syria. For the past year we’ve exchanged futile letters and messages—now I want a meeting. The truce must become a definite peace to end this shabby war. I’m going home.”

“England, sire?” The word trembled. Here was news with a vengeance, news to shake all Syria!

“Aye, England! I’ll raise men and money at any cost, and return here later for a better try at Jerusalem. Saladin will know only that I’m leaving, and will make excellent terms to get me gone. We must meet personally; that’s imperative. I’ll grant any kind of conditions, though we’ve already charted general terms. Get him here if possible. Tell the truth as I’ve just put it—except that I hope to return. He’ll understand what I’m after—he’s a smart devil. But, mind you, don’t tell the truth to another living soul, not even to the Queen!”

Fitzalan began to understand, too. These knights and lords of Syria, who had lost Jerusalem, would like King Richard to win it back for them—but all the same, they would trick him, rob him, betray him and ruin him. He knew it now.

While speaking, the King had been playing with a ring, a new one. He held it up, smiling admiringly, as Fitzalan regarded it with curiosity.

“A present; it came three days ago from Saladin. *Sala’h-ud-Din—Honoring the Faith!* Odd names these paynim bear. Well, give him his due, he’s an honest fellow.”

A lumpy, ill-formed, pale stone set in a gold ring. A true emerald, said Richard, who was vastly delighted with it. A messenger brought in a parchment, a mere two lines to which the royal seal had been affixed; the King gave it to Fitzalan.

“Your authority to speak for me. I must send a gift in return for this ring, too. You’re for the city? Then see the Queen. Ask her to give you the jeweled dagger I took from the Persian emir at the Askalon fight, and to wrap it fittingly. Eh?”

Fitzalan assented, and picking up the boy Yusef, took his departure for Acre, the army headquarters. This seaside outpost was merely a spot where the sick could come and bathe and refresh themselves under the present truce. Richard did not get on too well with Templars, Hospitallers, the various bishops and lords of the allied forces; and despite his vast energy was bitterly ill at times. Despondent, too, seeing the Crusade a failure for all his own victories; the outpost camp was his haven from difficulties.

Fitzalan entered the city, whose port was crammed with all sorts of vessels, and whose fine Arab palaces now housed the nobility of England, Cyprus, France and Provence. He sent the impudent, laughing Yusef home with the horses, telling him to have them ready for a daybreak ride, then sought the presence of Queen Berengaria, the slim Spanish princess whom Richard had carried off and married.

In the gay palace gardens, bright with the presence of troubadours, ladies, court officials and knights all gladly abandoned to idleness, he had no difficulty reaching the Queen, and presented Richard’s request. Berengaria at once sent for the dagger and a proper wrapping.

“A gift for the Sultan, eh?” she said. “An edged gift is bad luck—but Richard would never think of that, poor man! No word of a return to England?”

“None, madam,” lied Fitzalan, as he must—and the little Queen sighed.

“Alas, I’d like to see England! We’re well into the year 1192—must we stay here all our lives? Who is going as his embassy to Saladin?”

“Your Majesty, I did not ask. The King was very bright and cheerful.”

“That means trouble afoot,” she said shrewdly. “Here comes the pretty gaud now.”

One of her ladies brought the jeweled dagger wrapped in handsome Genoa velvet, and Fitzalan made his way to his own lodgings, the sunset light upon the city. He was a little heartsick, as always when in contact with the brilliant, sad court circle that was trying to make the best of a shabby situation. Supposedly, men served the Cross in utter self-abandon; actually, they fought one another bitterly—out for anything they could get.

Richard had stolen a bride in Spain, had rescued his sister Joan from unhappy marriage in Sicily and forced immense loot out of her former husband. He had taken Cyprus for himself and then sold it, plunging headlong into jealousies, treacheries and strife with other leaders of the Crusade. Personal bravery somewhat made up for these things, but only slightly. Fitzalan could guess that the coming peace with Saladin would under its specious cloak conceal some genial rascality. Saladin would guess it too. That Saracen was a wise man, generous, able, chivalrous, outgeneraling all the Crusading kings.

He thought of this again in the pale dim dawn, when he rode out with the eager town-boy beside him, now his esquire indeed. He wore a light helm, a light hauberk: he feared no treachery. Long Crusading years had brought Saracen and Christian together, giving them knowledge of each other, and mutual respect. Prisoners might still be slaughtered in ferocious outbursts; but in general there was a superficial veneer of chivalry and common decency.

His own affairs—this thought held Fitzalan. The Crusade had failed, and so had he. He had never found any trace of that older brother who had vanished four years ago in the fight at Ramleh. It was not from brother love alone that Fitzalan sought him, but because of the English title and estates—sordid worldly affairs, he granted bitterly.

As he rode, he chatted with the quick-witted, alert Yusef. The boy was unlike any other he knew—kings and spearmen and archers, all were weary for sight of home shores, home people, home ways. This was the fourth year in Syria. Even the kings and captains were now unspeakably weary. Richard had stuck it out longer than the others.

“Has the King given you no blazon?” the boy asked him. “You’re a knight; you should have a coat of arms like the others. French knights all have them.”

“He has promised, yes.” Fitzalan nodded toward the sunrise. “I must learn first about my brother. If he’s dead, I’ll be head of the house. If he’s alive, it’ll be different. Keep your eye peeled for that Arab outpost. Hard to see against the sunrise.”

“They say the King will marry his sister Joan to Saladin’s brother,” piped up the boy. “A dirty shame if he does, they all say—”

“Keep your tongue off the King’s doings, or you’ll get a flogging,” snapped Fitzalan.

Yet he felt the same himself. Everyone did. No one could tell if such a match would happen. Richard might well be weary enough to sacrifice a sister, if that would get him home again. God—to get home! That desire was now more powerful than for loot or women. There were ships and to spare, if they could but go! It had become an obsession.

But being a king, Richard could not just turn around and go as the others had done. He must, somehow, make a show of saving face. Fitzalan knew this.

“I see them now, master. They’re coming,” cried the little esquire.

A knot of men, dark under the sunrise, were approaching. They came nearer. Bearded men, their shields bearing odd and unknown blazonry. One rode out, saluting, and Fitzalan drew rein and spoke in the lingua franca, giving his name.

“An emissary from the King of England to Sultan Saladin. Is he anywhere near here?”

The dark man nodded. “He is camped within a three-hour ride. I’ll guide you. I am the Emir Mirza.”

The Saracens rode away. Mirza and one warrior rode south with Fitzalan. A pleasant, genial man, this emir, who chatted lightly as he rode. The two men were soon laughing together like old friends. The Saracens were war-weary too; Mirza made no secret of it. He

had not seen his home in two years and more, nor a son born since his leaving. Very human fellows, these Saracens, just like everyone else.

The three hours under early sun passed quickly. Fitzalan had food; Mirza had dates; they shared. They met two parties of Saracens, and finally rode into a ravine where an unexpected little town of mud houses developed, and trees, and water and farther on, black tents. Men appeared. Here was the Sultan himself.

Fitzalan was taken directly to him. A slender, arrow-straight man of fifty-five, grizzled beard, aquiline features, keen eyes. He read Richard's brief missive and nodded.

"Peace to you," he said. "Bathe, rest; later we'll eat and talk. You have good horses. Ha, a gift!"

The dagger pleased him and he slipped the chain over his head so that it hung on his chest, native style. He laughed lightly.

"I send your master an emerald that will bewitch him; he sends me a dagger—a fitting exchange! Well, sir knight, take your comfort. We have good water here."

Fitzalan and the wide-eyed Yusef were taken in hand by black men, bathed, rubbed, garbed in cool silken robes, and later brought into the black tent. The sand was covered with rich rugs and cushions. Numbers of captains were here, hard, armored fighters. Fitzalan eyed one of them amazedly, narrowly, then checked himself and settled on his cushions. Amenities and news were exchanged with his host. The latter then made blunt demand.

"You bear a message for me?"

"Aye, Lord Saladin; but not for my esquire or for your emirs."

The Saracens cleared out, taking the bragging, garrulous Yusef. Fitzalan followed the one man with his gaze—a bearded, brawny captain whose garments, under his steel-linked hauberk, were adorned with the crest of a cup in a circle. Saladin noted the look, and spoke.

"You seem interested in Firuk, my cup-bearer. You know him?"

"No, but I know his hauberk, a fine Flemish piece," said Fitzalan. "It was once worn by my brother."

He briefly mentioned his unavailing search. Then, alone, he plunged into the King's business. The older man listened, heard all the messenger had to say, then sat in thoughtful silence for a space.

"I shall never understand what the truth means to you Franks," he said at length. "Some of you respect it; others deride it. If I were to ask you something—"

At the pause, Fitzalan smiled. "The King ordered me to speak the exact truth to you, but to no one else."

"Ha! He did?" Saladin slapped his thigh and broke into quick laughter. "I see, I see! Things begin to come clear. Then let my questions wait a little. I'll put them to you later, when we have eaten, and shall then send you back. A night ride will not be unpleasant. But let us see about that brother of yours."

He clapped his hands and sent for Firuk. The latter appeared, touched forehead, lips and chest in salute, eyed the visitor curiously, and exchanged a torrent of Arabic with his master.

"He says," translated Saladin, "that the hauberk was worn by a knight with yellow hair whom he captured at Ramleh. The infidel was badly wounded, was taken to Egypt a captive, and was later sold to the chief of a Sahara tribe. Alive? Dead? He knows not."

Fitzalan relaxed. The same old story—nothing certain.

"I thank you," he said. "Then I can do nothing."

“Perhaps I can.” Saladin spoke anew with Firuk, who removed a ring from his hand and gave it over. Fitzalan recognized the worn old signet of his brother.

“Keep it as a gift, he says,” Saladin went on. “Now behold! Tomorrow I send a pigeon, which reaches Cairo before evening. My vizier gets its message. In Cairo, at the end of this week, gather representatives of the Sahara tribes to renew their fealty to me. They are questioned. The answer comes to me by pigeon—you see? In two weeks I bring it with me to the meeting with your master. Do you wish to ransom your brother?”

“Yes, yes!” cried Fitzalan, astonished and delighted. Saladin, enjoying his wonder, laughed softly, and for the moment, the affair was ended.

Or was it? Fitzalan had a feeling that forces were in action which had ends unforeseen; a feeling, rather than a thought. Saladin puzzled him. Here was the Sultan of all the Muslim encamped with a few men, yet in constant touch with all parts of his vast empire. And during the frugal meal that followed, he was conscious of the interest of the emirs and captains. Why, he did not know; but they certainly discussed him.

They interested him, too. They could fight, yet had not the huge armor-breaking swords of the Crusaders. Their deadly blades were straight or curved, lithe and razor-edged. They were nimble men, quick of wit. Yusef had become a favorite among them. Watching them at prayer, one could guess them sincere and devout.

The meal over, all dispersed. Fitzalan went outside, looking at the stars. Mirza came to him.

“Later I am to accompany you back. Your horses are cared for. Give me, I pray you, your blessing.”

Astonished, Fitzalan said: “You mistake; I’m no priest or holy man.”

“Our master said you are the one Frank he has met who seeks nothing for himself; therefore you may be an agent of destiny and Allah. Your blessing is worth while.”

Sheepishly, Fitzalan complied. Other peoples, other customs! He understood now why they had seemed interested in him. A little afterward, when they were talking alone again, Saladin said much the same thing, quite frankly.

“Let us speak the truth, my guest. If you do so, it may mean much to your people and mine. Suppose, for example, that I agree with your master to make my brother Sayf-ed-Din, Sword of the Faith, the King of Jerusalem; that he is to marry the sister of your King, who will bring him Acre as her dowry; that he is to give your people free access to the Holy City. Think you Melek el Anketar would wish such terms?”

“Yes.” Amazed, delighted, Fitzalan began to see the point. Could Richard make such a peace, his failures would be all forgotten. “I think he would.”

“And would your emirs and bishops all swear obedience to a peace on such terms?”

“Our English barons, yes. The Templars, Hospitallers and Syrian bishops—no. Not unless your brother were to become a Christian.”

Saladin broke into amused laughter. “Then your King talks for all Christians—but in actual reality I deal with him for himself and his army alone, eh?”

Fitzalan assented grudgingly, but the Sultan seemed delighted.

“Good! An understanding is excellent. I see why he sent you. He is an honest man. He knows the value of truth in a world of rascals. Others in your armies seek to bribe me with

gold. He bribes me with the truth. By Allah, I like that man! We shall get on. I am sorry now that I sent him the emerald.”

“He is overjoyed with it.”

“No. Warn him. It will bewitch him.” Saladin shook his head earnestly. “It is an old, famous, very evil jewel. It bewitches its owners.”

Fitzalan did not argue the matter. It was now arranged that in two weeks Saladin should come to the camp outside Acre and meet Richard. Details of the escort were settled. All war was to be ended for a term of three years. A remarkable belt and straight sword, its hilt of massive carved gold, was presented to Fitzalan as a token of his host’s appreciation, and the audience was finished.

Ten minutes later he and the boy Yusef were riding with Mirza under the stars. Seeking his chance, Yusef drew close and spoke in French softly to Fitzalan:

“Master, there was another Frank in that camp, a man from Acre. He has been there two days, I learned, but kept himself hidden from you. They say he was sent by the Templars to arrange financial matters dealing with tributes paid and prisoners to be ransomed.”

Curious, thought Fitzalan. That was what Saladin had meant by mentioning attempts to bribe him. The matter slipped from his mind. It was none of his affair.

Mirza, as though following some unseen road, led him straight across the plain to the seaside camp. It was past midnight when Fitzalan passed the sentries. Following orders, he asked for the King and was taken to the royal pavilion. Lights sprang up. Richard, a cloak flung about him, came into the outer tent and embraced him with a bear-hug.

“You didn’t reach him already—and back again? Magnificent! I’ll order some wine; then we’ll be alone. You had luck, eh?”

“The best,” said Fitzalan, and said no more until the wine was brought and they were in private. He noted that Richard still wore the emerald ring. Then he got into his story, related everything in detail, and did not forget the curious warning of Saladin about the emerald. At this Richard laughed heartily.

“Bewitch me? Not likely. He wants it back, that’s all. Wait till I show you its secret. . . . But go ahead!”

Fitzalan complied. He spoke of his own affairs and showed the signet Firuk had given up. The King sat in a glow of utter delight, examined the gift sword, gulped his wine.

“Lucky man indeed! You’ve won the Sultan’s favor—you must sit in the peace conference. Here, take the emerald to the lamplight, examine the figure inside the stone. Can you see it? A Sphinx, a very Sphinx, utterly exact!”

“What’s a Sphinx?” queried Fitzalan, to whom the word was new.

“Look and see. A monument of ancient Egypt—lion body, man head. Whether it be magic or no, it’s a marvel! And more,” Richard added, “the emerald itself is tonic to the mind. Sharpens the wits, they say; I find it true. This jewel may bewitch some folk, but gazing into it provokes great thoughts of high emprise. Ah, I love the stone!”

No use going on to the city at this hour, said the King. Stay here, take a couch in the tent, and enjoy a morning swim later. Fitzalan complied. He told Yusef to turn in the horses with those of the King and be ready to go into Acre on the morrow.

Morning brought details—letters from Cyprus, business to handle with the Venetians; Richard kept him busy following his early swim. When by afternoon he was ready to leave,

Yusef had disappeared. He thought nothing of it. Sometimes the boy was gone for days at a time.

Before leaving camp, he did have a good look at the emerald in full sunlight, and it astonished him. The tiny Sphinx-figure stood out distinct and clear, and there was no way for it to have been inserted in the stone. It was a true freak of nature. So upon this he had his horses saddled, and rode into Acre.

No sign of Yusef here. During the next three days, Fitzalan was harried by important duties, securing contracts with half a dozen shipowners on behalf of the King, for sailing in a month's time. The Queen and court ladies had to be secured passage first of all, then lesser women, and the chief barons and captains. All these could chance the passage home via France; but whether or not Richard could, was not so sure. For him France might be unsafe.

Inevitably, word spread of a coming return to England. Possibly, said the King; it depended on whether a peace was effected. Since Fitzalan alone knew of the broad gold coin paid over, nobody was certain of Richard's intent, but rumors flew and excitement rose. And then, without warning, the boy Yusef turned up in ghastly fashion.

During this time Fitzalan had been increasingly aware of scowls and mutters. It was different when he met a French knight he knew well, and heard an angry oath.

"Perchance, monsieur, you are displeased?" he said, halting.

"With friends of heathen Saracens, yes," snapped the Frenchman. "Your ragged, comic esquire has hinted at your doings. A fine sword you're wearing—no doubt it came from England?"

Fitzalan let the sarcasm pass, let the quarrel go; abruptly uneasy, he pushed the query about Yusef and was told to visit the quay of Genoa. He went straight on to the quays, saw a crowd at the wharf of the Genoa galleys, and pushed through to find the boy Yusef just picked out of the water, dead, cut badly, a knife still in him. Fitzalan took the knife, examined it, gave orders about the body. Little grief shook him, but hot anger did. On the way home he met an official of the Hospitallers, halted him, displayed the knife, told whence it had come.

"Here in the wooden haft is burned the name of Menpes," he added. "I accuse Sir Jean Menpes as the murderer of my esquire. Since he is one of your knights, I ask justice."

"Ask and be damned," said the Hospitaller. "You're half a Saracen yourself. The boy told plenty. Go ask your friend Saladin for justice!"

Fitzalan, amazed and aghast, hotly sought advice from the King's chamberlain, who threw up his hands and groaned in despair.

"You can't bring such a charge against a knight of the Hospital! The King? He would back you in hot fury. That's what they want—an end to all amity, to all his plans—"

"And I'm to let my retainers be butchered with impunity?" snapped Fitzalan.

"If you're a great man enough to control yourself, yes. Good God, don't you know the gossip that's going around? You make secret visits to the Saracen camp, receive gifts from the Sultan—in a word, you're a recreant knight and no Christian! That's the rumor."

"Bosh!" Fitzalan was white to the lips with rage. "All done on the King's service!"

"Aye. Prove it. Let Richard come barging in, raising hell, starting a new and more savage feud with the French, with the Hospital—that's what they want! Man, we can't afford it now. Suffer in peace, for God's love!"

Fitzalan understood at last, and suffered with infuriated meekness. Yusef had been caught, tortured for information, killed. He himself was under deep suspicion—that Frank hidden in

the Saracen camp had caused it all. Appeal to the King would bring instant justice. Richard would come charging into Acre like a mad bull—to what good? Another and more bitter quarrel would be under way. The Hospitallers wanted it, hoped to provoke it.

“I’ll bear with it,” he said at last, “for the greater good. If I can.”

The days brought him ostracism, except among the English; taunts, open sneers, insults—treatment unendurable by any knight. He endured silently, kept to himself, and inwardly grew white-hot in fury. Richard had strictly forbidden private quarrels.

The situation would have drawn wide attention, but now news of the peace conference was spread, and this overwhelmed all lesser events. Saladin was coming with his emirs and relatives and captains—coming to make peace! False rumors sped on eager wing. Excitement lifted every heart. Home! Home again, the war ended!

Twice, attending the King out at the shore camp, Fitzalan saw the big emerald, saw Richard sitting gazing at it as though indeed bewitched, and wondered. He was so choked by his own bottled-up fury, however, as to give scant attention. Richard was wearing the fine mantle on which the court ladies had embroidered his new arms—three leopards, it was said. Since no one had ever seen a leopard, many fantastic heraldic arguments arose, to the vast amusement of the King.

Fitzalan had new duties that kept him busy, in preparing for the coming guests. Saladin was bringing a hundred of his chosen captains; Richard was choosing an equal number of his own knights, with the Grand Masters of the Temple and Hospital, to receive them. Pavilions had to be made ready, horse lines prepared, servants instructed, protocol settled by the heralds—a world of details.

In the midst of all, with the arrivals due on the morrow, Fitzalan came late to his lodgings in town. He dismounted, entered the courtyard, and was aware of a dark figure by the gate lantern. He heard his name called.

“Yes?” he said, turning. Then he saw who the visitor was.

“I have come, Englishman, to give you what you deserve,” said Sir Jean Menpes. A whip whistled, and Fitzalan felt the lash sting across his face.

That loosed the gates. Forgetful of all knightly courtesy, aware only of the uncontrollable fury at last set free, Fitzalan stepped forward and his fists smashed in twice—terrific blows with his full weight in them, crude peasant blows, knuckles sinking into bony face. The man with the whip collapsed under those crashing fists and lay quiet.

Fitzalan went on into his lodgings, slightly appeased, but when morning came he saw that the red weal of the whip would not come from his face. He was marked. And this day Saladin would arrive—this very morning. With a shrug, he shaved and dressed, and rode out of town to the camp, and said nothing to anyone about the mark on his face.

Saladin and his retinue arrived, before the hot noonday. What with drums and trumpets, Richard in his gorgeous scarlet mantle with the golden leopards, the famous Saracen knights and lordly Crusaders, the slim graceful figure of Saladin, heralds and troubadours, the camp was a bedlam. No women, of course, were here—the presence of even the Queen would have affronted Arab notions. Guests were shown to quarters, horses were taken care of, and the deadly enemies made a fine pretense of fellowship.

With Richard, who took Saladin in his eager personal charge, the fellowship was very real. He was absorbed in his guest, and Fitzalan had no difficulty in keeping out of his way and his regard. Hawks had been brought, and Richard was very keen about hawking; the birds and

their keepers were given into Fitzalan's charge and when, in mid-afternoon, he was abruptly summoned to the royal tent, he supposed it was on this business.

He found Richard and Saladin in eager talk; Blondel, the minstrel-swordsman, and half a dozen others were at a little distance, while crowds surged through the adjoining pavilions. This was a purely social gathering. Business would come tomorrow.

"Ha, Fitzalan—this way!" cried the King. "Our guest has asked for you!"

Fitzalan approached and saluted. The King's words had provoked a general stir of interest. Saladin smiled.

"A promise is an obligation, my friend," he said. "I brought the news as I foretold. It is not, I fear, good news. The man in question died two years ago. My secretary will give you the message to this effect."

Fitzalan thanked him; then he observed that the forehead of Richard was darkening with a flush of passion—in Richard this was a sure sign of threatening outbreak.

"What is this?" asked the King abruptly. "Your face is marked, Fitzalan. Explain it. Speak out. By my father King Harry, let's have the reason!"

In a flash, Fitzalan saw that Richard knew everything and had deliberately chosen this moment for a clearance. But it was a bad moment.

"A drunken assassin in the city last night, sire," he said lightly. "I punished him as he deserved. It was too dark to see his identity."

"So?" Perhaps Richard took warning. His gaze was stormy. Then he lifted his hand and for an instant his eyes were fastened upon the emerald. "I promised," he went on slowly, "to give you a blazon. Now that your brother is dead, you are the head of your house, so wear a leopard. Leopards are for England, or shall be. Take a leopard—my brother, you know this animal, no doubt?" He turned to Saladin, touching the leopards on his mantle.

"I do not," said Saladin, "but I shall be honored in learning from your lips. Is it an English animal?"

"No, a famed beast of far countries," said Richard. "According to the tales of travelers, a leopard is begotten in spouse-breach between the lion and the fabulous pard, and we have no exact description. Therefore we give him the aspect of his sire, as is most probable, and distinguish him from the lion by showing him full-face, gazing sideways at the beholder, a lion being usually shown in profile."

"A new animal in blazonry," said Saladin with interest. "And with your permission, may I not add a touch to the arms you give this knight? With the leopard, then, let him wear in memory of our friendship a star, drawn in whatever fashion may please your custom."

"Good! Be it so, Fitzalan!" exclaimed Richard, whose brow had cleared again.

Fitzalan was rendering the proper thanks, when a slight commotion took place outside. Blondel, a lute in his hand, stepped quickly closer to the King, his eyes vigilant. A chamberlain in some flurried haste appeared and bawled forth an announcement.

"Your Majesty, the Grand Master of the Order of the Hospital has arrived to greet Your Majesty's distinguished guest."

"Ha! An unexpected courtesy," said Richard dryly. "Let him enter."

The Grand Master was entering, a half-dozen of his knights with him, clanking in full mail. Richard's forehead was looking angry again; the proud hauteur of this distinguished order was not to his taste. Yet Fitzalan was puzzled to observe his evident effort at self-

control. It was as though the King knew of threatening danger and, for once, was trying to fend it off instead of meeting it bull-fashion.

When among the party Fitzalan saw the figure of Sir Jean Menpes, with face bandaged, he scented trouble brewing, and withdrew to the side of Blondel, who gave him a swift, significant look. However, the knights saluted Richard as usual, gave Saladin friendly greeting, and the Grand Master spoke in smooth polished Arabic. All the while, Fitzalan noted, the King was fixedly looking down at the ring on his hand. It sharpened the wits, he had said. He had need of that emerald now, if ever.

Saladin spoke courteously, firmly, hinting at the desire for peace which had brought him here. He finished. The Grand Master made brief reply, then turned to Richard.

"It grieves me, Your Majesty," he said in French, "that I am compelled to seek justice at your hands, yet knowing your strong desire for equity I am confident it will be granted gladly."

Richard gave him the lion's look, threatening much.

"You are right," he replied. "But I know not the form of your complaint."

The Grand Master motioned to Sir Jean Menpes.

"One of your knights, Majesty, only last night made a strange assault with his bare hands upon this excellent gentleman of the Order, and indeed struck him senseless. Therefore I must seek from your justice a meeting between the two, in the fashion usual to knights and gentlemen."

"One moment," said Richard quietly. "Of your kindness—a moment."

In the silence, every eye except his own went to Fitzalan; but Richard was looking again at the emerald on his hand, as though seeking in the green stone some advice and counsel. So, perhaps, he was.

The purpose of this visit was now evident enough, at least to Fitzalan. Single combat between himself and Menpes—and beyond this the murder charge. Could the lion-fury of Richard be aroused, a definite breach would be made, all negotiations might well fall through; it was only too certain, in the usual course of events, that Richard would fly to the defense of his own people with a tremendous and unrecking fury. But, as he now gazed upon the emerald, the King was slightly smiling.

"Who is this knight of mine whom you accuse?" he asked.

"Sir James Fitzalan, Your Majesty."

The King looked up, looked at Menpes, and asked a question.

"Your Grand Master, who is our beloved friend and most honored ally, has stated your case, Sir Jean Menpes. I do not suggest that he is wrong. Still, error is possible to anyone, and therefore I ask whether you support his charge."

Menpes bowed as well as his armor would let him.

"Absolutely, Your Majesty. Every word which he has uttered is the exact truth."

"Good. Let all present remember the charge," said the King. "Sir James Fitzalan, I should like to hear what you have to say regarding this matter. The leopards are for England, so it seems to me that exact justice is necessary."

The leopards are for England—the words, the look accompanying them, struck deep meaning into Fitzalan's mind. A hint: The important thing was getting away for England. Nothing else mattered. Exact justice—was it possible that the lion had turned to a smooth craft as cunning as that of the Grand Master?

“It is very simple, sire,” said Fitzalan. “The entry to my lodgings is dark. As I returned there last night, someone waiting there assaulted me with a wild cry—assaulted me, not as a gentleman, but as a footpad. So I knocked him senseless and went on to my rooms. Naturally I could not, either then or now, make use of the weapons of a knight against a mere footpad in the night.”

Quickly, so quickly as to show that he meant to give the enemy no time, Richard spoke up. He seemed vastly amused.

“This is a very odd mistake! Evidently it is a mistake, as you must all admit. Fitzalan’s face bears the mark of assault. A senseless man could not have struck the blow, so it is obvious that he was the first assaulted. Nor could he draw sword upon a footpad, as he says. Any man, gentle or ignoble, who makes an assault in the dark forfeits all his rights to the customs of chivalry and knighthood, including those of judicial combat. As we have today met in gentle chivalry toward all enemies, I admonish Fitzalan to forget this mistaken charge upon the part of Sir Jean, who evidently suffers from error, perhaps from too much wine. So, my honored Grand Master, since it is evident that no knight of your noble Order could play the part of footpad, it were best to pass over all charges.”

Smoothly said, silkily said—why, here was a new and novel Richard! And he had the Hospitallers where he wanted them. Menpes dared not mention the whip, dared not admit he had been lying in wait. The Grand Master, having failed to provoke the lion’s wrath, was helpless. That weal across Fitzalan’s face had conquered him. His whole attack had missed fire.

Bowing to the King, he accepted defeat gracefully and withdrew from a very bad situation, taking his knights with him. The King beckoned Fitzalan, and held up his hand to display the ring.

“You see? It counseled me, sharpened my wits, as I told you it did,” he said. “Are you satisfied or do you wish to press matters to an end?”

“Sire, I am more than satisfied,” said Fitzalan. “I am delighted. I did not know Your Majesty was aware of all the events.”

“I keep informed,” said Richard, brusquely, and he turned to Saladin. “Tomorrow we’ll make that peace treaty, eh? Everything is settled except the length of the peace.”

“I think,” said the Sultan, his eyes twinkling, “that three years should be long enough. My relatives, my emirs, all will swear to keep the peace—and you shall find that the Muslim keep their oaths.”

“Yes,” said Richard. “Some Christians I know might take a lesson from them. Well, tomorrow sees it done, then.”

The morrow saw it done. What is more—and mentioned with the greatest astonishment by the Arab chroniclers—was that the morrow saw Saladin and Richard exchange a hearty English handclasp upon the terms of the treaty.

Not that this mattered. Before the English army was over the sea horizon, the peace was smashed to flinders—and not by Saracen violators either. But what of that? The emerald had departed upon its curious way, to be lost in English fogs and laid away and forgotten, until another king remembered it and brought it forth to later adventure.

Like the leopards, the emerald was now for England—temporarily at least.

[The end of *Leopards Are for England* by Henry Bedford-Jones]