

RED FALCONS OF TRÉMOINE

by Hendry Peart

ILLUSTRATED BY MAURICE BREVANNES



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*For
My nephew
Steven*

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CHAPTER ONE

The Knight from Palestine

“LEO!” called Hugh of New Normandy, peering between the new-budding leaves of the Abbey orchard. “Hey, where are you, boy? There’s a band of people coming down the road! A knight’s banner with red falcons, and two ladies, and a number of armed men. Come down and see the show.”

The boy called Leo thrust a yellow head and a stormy face between the leaves of the apple tree where he sat in the fork of two sturdy boughs. “Oh, I don’t care, Hugh! It was good of you to come for me, but I don’t care if it’s King Richard and Prince John and Queen Eleanor and William the Marshal all in one party! Please go away and leave me alone. I’m in a very bad temper.”

Hugh laughed good-naturedly. “You’re still angry because of Father Guillaume’s meanness,” he said, shaking the tree in which his fellow student sat. “But you can’t pretend not to be interested! Why, days and days go by here at the Abbey when we don’t see a single strange face—or even slightly familiar one! You *must* come. It might even be your friend Lady Olivet de Mardans.”

“It won’t be Lady Olivet,” said Leo gloomily. “She’s getting betrothed to a Crusader just back from the Holy Land, and she’ll be much too busy to come visiting us here.” But the anger died in his face at the mention of the youthful lady who had befriended a friendless boy, and he slid down from his perch in the apple tree.

“Come, that’s better,” said kindly Hugh. “I knew you would be interested!”

“I am still not interested,” said Leo. “But that was the first bell for Nones, in case you didn’t hear it.”

“Father Guillaume *has* soured your temper! But, Leo, he is like that to all us students—it isn’t anything against you.”

“Oh, isn’t it?” cried Leo indignantly. “Who else is badgered at lessons and driven from one task to another without any

leisure or recreation and always scolded and never approved? And today he said I had been so bad that he would send me to the Abbot after Nones with a record of all my sins, so that he could punish me fittingly. Does he treat anyone else like that?"

"Well, I must admit I don't care to be sent to the Abbot. He can be very stern, for all that gentle manner of his. Poor Leo, it really is too bad! Father Guillaume does seem to be sterner with you than with us others, now I come to think of it."

Leo kicked at the sodden remains of a last-year's apple. "It's all very well for you and Guibert and Robert and Roger—you have homes to go to, but I belong to the monastery, having neither home nor name!"

Hugh twisted uncomfortably. He was a kindly soul and liked to avoid as much unhappiness as possible, for himself or anyone else. And there was pain and trouble in Leo's voice, and a bitter knowledge that he could never expect to have what Hugh had and took for granted. "That's true, and I wish I could do something for you, Leo, and perhaps when I am knighted I shall find a way. Now let's race to the roadside. We can get a good view of the visitors and still be in time for Nones."

It was not in Leo to be ill-tempered for long. "Oh, all right, if you are so anxious to see these visitors!" There was a touch of a smile at the corner of his mouth, and he raced away, lighter of foot than stolid Hugh, and soon outstripped him.

They arrived panting at the roadside as the mounted party came over a slight rise in the road. A tall dark knight headed the travelers, riding a horse of the favorite white. He was not in armor, since the countryside was at peace, but his great sword was buckled to his side and a sheathed dagger hung at his belt, for there were always wicked men abroad to attack travelers. Beside him rode a golden-haired girl with a blue veil. Like most ladies who traveled by horseback instead of riding in a litter, she rode astride, the immensely long and wide skirts of her dress hanging gracefully on either side to cover her feet. Behind the knight rode his squire, carrying the knight's banner with three red falcons on a white ground. At this lad's side was the golden-haired girl's lady-in-waiting, dark and young, and behind these two a group of armed men.



The gold-and-blue lady waved to the boys. “It *is* Lady Olivet!” said Leo with a face like Easter morning. “Oh, but I’m glad! Perhaps that’s her affianced husband she is bringing to present to my lord Abbot.”

“After all, my lord Abbot is her kinsman,” suggested Hugh. “Red falcons, that knight bears. That should be one of the Trémoines. Odd that she should be marrying a Trémoine, when they’ve been at feud with the De Mardanses for years.”

“If it’s Lady Olivet’s betrothed, and it must be, for he wears a Crusader’s mustache, he *is* a Trémoine—Sir Richard of Falconstead. Own cousin to the wicked Baron Rolf of Trémoine Castle away over by the river. Yes, they hope this marriage will keep peace between the two families.”

“I suppose Lady Olivet told you.” Hugh was faintly jealous. “Well, if I hadn’t been so ill last winter, I should be a squire by now, and I would have learned the difference between the banners of various branches of the family.”

“That fever was a miserable thing—I had it, too.” Leo looked at him with a warm smile. “But I can’t be sorry you were ill, Hugh.

Otherwise you wouldn't have been sent to school here while you got strong again, and I would never have known you."

They ran to meet the travelers. Again Leo outraced Hugh and came first to Lady Olivet's side.

"Good day, little Leo!" she cried gaily, reining in and reaching her hand down to him. She was three years older than he, and his superior in rank, so it was her privilege to consider him quite a child.

"Good day, my lady! Your coming brightens the sunshine," he said shyly, bending his head to kiss her hand.

"A fully trained page couldn't have prettier manners," Lady Olivet approved, smiling. "You are looking well, Leo. Have you quite recovered from the fever you had in the winter?"

"Yes, thank you, my lady." He looked up at her adoringly. She was so pretty that it was delightful to look at her. Her hair was much the same corn-gold as his, but where his eyes were brown, hers were deep blue. The simple gown she wore was of a blue the color of her eyes.

She smiled at him again and turned to greet Hugh, who had just come up panting. Leo, knowing he could not be introduced to the knight before Hugh was, greeted the lady-in-waiting. She was Lady Olivet's cousin, and so had a double claim on his courtesy. Besides, he did not want her to feel neglected. "Are you well, Lady Laudine?"

She thanked him with her rare, lovely smile that lightened her still, sad young face. He knew her tragedy: the knight she was to have married, whom she had dearly loved, had been killed in Palestine, and she had become her cousin's lady-in-waiting rather than enter a nunnery. Olivet was like a sister to her, but even her love could not restore to Laudine the husband and position in life which she had hoped to have.

She was not, however, so taken up with herself that she forgot to introduce her companion, the dark lad who carried Sir Richard's banner: "This is Master Martin, Leo, Sir Richard's squire, who was with him in Palestine." The dark lad smiled, and Leo greeted him very properly.

He caught his own name and turned to find himself being introduced to Sir Richard Trémoine. "And this is Leo of St. Michael's Abbey, Richard." It sounded grand the way Lady Olivet said it—