

An excerpt from  
**Red Falcons of Tremoine**  
by Hendry Peart

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—almost like having a name of one's own. "You remember I told you about him?—the one I call my protégé, though really there is nothing to protect him from!"

Leo looked up into the knight's face, darkly tanned by Palestinian suns but lighted by bright dark eyes. The Crusader's mustache gave him a faintly foreign air, for there were not many veterans of the Third Crusade in this part of the country.

"This is Leo, is it?" said Sir Richard kindly, studying him with a little frown. "Where did you get that odd combination of dark eyes and fair hair?"

Leo flushed a little. "I don't know, sir. I don't know who my parents were."

"Ah, forgive me. It's an unusual coloring, and caught my eye. I hope you are well, lad?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

Leo turned with relief to his friend as Hugh began an eager question.

Sir Richard said: "I was just telling Hugh that his father and I were pages together and played many a prank on one another."

"Sir Richard, will you tell us some of your adventures in the Holy Land?" Hugh asked eagerly.

"What, now?" asked Sir Richard, laughing. "We shall be late for Nones."

"Not now, sir, but—you're going to stay the night, aren't you?"

"I think not. The evenings are so light now that I can get my lady back home to Thorndene before dark. But we might find time for a tale or two. Will you walk to the church with us?" They set off again at a walk, and the boys walked with them. The Abbey gates were opened now to let the travelers in. On the steps of the Abbot's house stood Abbot Michael himself, with Prior Anselm, his second in command, and Father Jerome, the Hospitaller, waiting to greet the guests before they all went in to the three-o'clock service. The Abbot wore the same simple black habit that his monks wore, and his white head was bare to the spring sunshine. The fine, strong, sweet old face was smiling. He looked like a saint, which is what he was in the eyes of all who knew him.

Sir Richard dismounted at the steps, and the boys could see now how lame he was from a wound received fighting for the Holy Sepulcher, and this made him seem all the more interesting to them. He helped Lady Olivet down with affectionate courtesy, and the two of them knelt for the Abbot's blessing.

"God be with you, Lady Oliva," the Abbot said then, in his musical voice. "And this is your affianced husband, Sir Richard Trémoine of Falconstead? You are welcome to St. Michael's Abbey, Sir Richard." The knight bowed and acknowledged the Abbot's greeting. "And how is my kinswoman Isabelle?"

"My mother is well, thank you, Father Abbot," Lady Olivet answered. "But, my lord, you have always called me Olivet, like my family and friends. You must not be formal and call me Lady Oliva now that I am betrothed."

"As you wish, Cousin Olivet." The old man smiled. Courteous to high and low alike, he greeted Laudine de Mardans and the squire Martin and the men who attended Sir Richard. The last bell rang, and the Abbot had just time to say: "I see you captured my truant scholars on your way," before it was necessary to enter the Abbey church for the Office of Nones.

Hugh and Leo made their way to the choir, where all the monks and novices and postulants and students were in their stalls. Father Laurence, the Precentor, raised his eyebrows at them in mild reproof as they took their places, for they were very nearly late. As soon as the Abbot had taken his place before his great chair, the Precentor began the Antiphon which opened the service.

Leo stole a glance down into the great nave of the church, where cushions to kneel on and

benches for seats had been provided for the distinguished visitors. The attendants stood or knelt on the stone floor behind them, and the rest of the congregation was made up of a scattering of other travelers seeking the Abbey's hospitality, or villagers from the Abbey's holdings. Even at this hour, with the radiant sunshine outside, the immense stone church was dim, and at that distance, faces were a mere blur, but he could distinguish Olivet's blue veil. As they stood for the next psalm, Leo was almost taken by surprise, and caught a warning frown from Father Laurence which told him to keep his mind on the service. His guilty heart sank. Oh, it was too bad! Everything he did was wrong—and yet, as he had said to Hugh, he felt badgered and put upon. Everyone seemed to single him out for scolding and tasks that no one else wanted to do. He tried to pay attention to the service, and such was the discipline of his short life of fifteen years that he succeeded, but his heart was still rebellious. And after this Office he had to go and receive his punishment from the lord Abbot himself. Perhaps his lord Abbot would punish him by depriving him of Lady Olivet's company. Leo would far rather have been beaten, but the choice was not his to make.

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