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The main illustration depicts a scene from a medieval story. A woman with long, flowing red hair, wearing a white gown with gold trim and a crown, stands on the left. She holds a sword over the head of a kneeling knight. The knight is wearing chainmail and a red surcoat with a black eagle emblem. In the background, other figures in medieval attire are visible, including a man in a blue tunic and a woman in a brown tunic. The setting appears to be an interior room with stone walls and a patterned rug.

THE
BRETHREN

H. RIDER
HAGGARD

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H. RIDER HAGGARD



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The Brethren

First published in 1904

ISBN 978-1-62012-042-2

Duke Classics

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Contents

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[Dedication](#)

[Notes](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter One - By the Waters of Death Creek](#)

[Chapter Two - Sir Andrew D'Arcy](#)

[Chapter Three - The Knighting of the Brethren](#)

[Chapter Four - The Letter of Saladin](#)

[Chapter Five - The Wine Merchant](#)

[Chapter Six - The Christmas Feast at Steeple](#)

[Chapter Seven - The Banner of Saladin](#)

[Chapter Eight - The Widow Masouda](#)

[Chapter Nine - The Horses Flame and Smoke](#)

[Chapter Ten - On Board the Galley](#)

[Chapter Eleven - The City of Al-Je-Bal](#)

[Chapter Twelve - The Lord of Death](#)

[Chapter Thirteen - The Embassy](#)

[Chapter Fourteen - The Combat on the Bridge](#)

[Chapter Fifteen - The Flight to Emesa](#)

[Chapter Sixteen - The Sultan Saladin](#)

[Chapter Seventeen - The Brethren Depart from Damascus](#)

[Chapter Eighteen - Wulf Pays for the Drugged Wine](#)

[Chapter Nineteen - Before the Walls of Ascalon](#)

[Chapter Twenty - The Luck of the Star of Hassan](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One - What Befell Godwin](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two - At Jerusalem](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Three - Saint Rosamund](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four - The Dregs of the Cup](#)

[Endnotes](#)

Dedication

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R.M.S. Mongolia, 12th May, 1904 Mayhap, Ella, here too distance lends its enchantment, and the gallant brethren would have quarrelled over Rosamund, or even had their long swords at each other's throat. Mayhap that Princess and heroine might have failed in the hour of her trial and never earned her saintly crown. Mayhap the good horse "Smoke" would have fallen on the Narrow Way, leaving false Lozelle a victor, and Masouda, the royal-hearted, would have offered up a strangely different sacrifice upon the altars of her passionate desire.

Still, let us hold otherwise, though we grow grey and know the world for what it is. Let us for a little time think as we thought while we were young; when faith knew no fears for anything and death had not knocked upon our doors; when you opened also to my childish eyes that gate of ivory and pearl which leads to the blessed kingdom of Romance.

At the least I am sure, and I believe that you, my sister, will agree with me, that, above and beyond its terrors and its pitfalls, Imagination has few finer qualities, and none, perhaps, more helpful to our hearts, than those which enable us for an hour to dream that men and women, their fortunes and their fate, are as we would fashion them.

H. Rider Haggard. To Mrs. Maddison Green.

Notes

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"Two lovers by the maiden sate,
Without a glance of jealous hate;
The maid her lovers sat between,
With open brow and equal mien;
—It is a sight but rarely spied,
Thanks to man's wrath and woman's pride."

Scott

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Standing a while ago upon the flower-clad plain above Tiberius, by the Lake of Galilee, the writer gazed at the double peaks of the Hill of Hattin. Here, or so tradition says, Christ preached the Sermon on the Mount—that perfect rule of gentleness and peace. Here, too—and this is certain—after nearly twelve centuries had gone by, Yusuf Salah-ed-din, whom we know as the Sultan Saladin, crushed the Christian power in Palestine in perhaps the most terrible battle which that land of blood has known. Thus the Mount of the Beatitudes became the Mount of Massacre.

Whilst musing on these strangely-contrasted scenes enacted in one place there arose in his mind a desire to weave, as best he might, a tale wherein any who are drawn to the romance of that pregnant and mysterious epoch, when men by thousands were glad to lay down their lives for visions and spiritual hopes, could find a picture, however faint and broken, of the long war between Cross and Crescent waged among the Syrian plains and deserts. Of Christian knights and ladies also, and their loves and sufferings in England and the East; of the fearful lord of the Assassins whom the Frankish called Old Man of the Mountain, and his fortress city, Masyaf. Of the great-hearted, if at times cruel, Saladin and his fierce Saracens; of the rout at Hattin itself, on whose rocky height the Holy Rood was set up as a standard and captured, to be seen no more by Christian eyes; and of the last surrender whereby the Crusaders lost Jerusalem forever.

Of that desire this story is the fruit.

Prologue

*

Salah-ed-din, Commander of the Faithful, the king Strong to Aid, Sovereign of the East, sat at night in his palace at Damascus and brooded on the wonderful ways of God, by Whom he had been lifted to his high estate. He remembered how, when he was but small in the eyes of men, Nour-ed-din, king of Syria, forced him to accompany his uncle, Shirkuh, to Egypt, whither he went, "like one driven to his death," and how, against his own will, there he rose to greatness. He thought of his father, the wise Ayoub, and the brethren with whom he was brought up, all of them dead now save one; and of his sisters, whom he had cherished. Most of all did he think of her, Zobeide, who had been stolen away by the knight whom she loved even to the loss of her own soul—yes, by the English friend of his youth, his father's prisoner, Sir Andrew D'Arcy, who, led astray by passion, had done him and his house the grievous wrong. He had sworn, he remembered, that he would bring her back even from England, and he had already planned to kill her husband and capture her when he learned her death. She had left no child, or so his spies told him, who, if she still lived, must be a woman now—his own niece, though half of noble English blood.

Then his mind wandered from this old, half-forgotten story to the woe and blood in which his days were set, and to the last great struggle between the followers of the prophets Jesus and Mahomet, the Jihad (*Holy War*) for which he made ready—and he sighed. For he was a merciful man, who loved not slaughter, although his fierce faith drove him from war to war.

Salah-ed-din slept and dreamed of peace. In his dream a maiden stood before him. Presently, when she lifted her veil, he saw that she was beautiful, with features like his own, but fairer, and knew her surely for the daughter of his sister who had fled with the English knight. Now he wondered why she visited him thus, and in his vision prayed Allah to make the matter clear. Then of a sudden he saw the same woman standing before him on a Syrian plain, and on either side of her a countless host of Saracens and Franks, of whom thousands and tens of thousands were appointed to death. Lo! he saw Salah-ed-din, charged at the head of his squadrons, scimitar aloft, but she held up her hand and stayed him.

"What do you hear, my niece?" he asked.

"I am come to save the lives of men through you," she answered; "therefore was I born of your blood and therefore I am sent to you. Put up your sword, King, and spare them."

"Say, maiden, what ransom do you bring to buy this multitude from doom? What ransom, and what gift?"

"The ransom of my own blood freely offered, and Heaven's gift of peace to your sinful soul, O King. And with that outstretched hand she drew down his keen-edged scimitar until it rested on her breast.

Salah-ed-din awoke, and marvelled on his dream, but said nothing of it to any man. The next night it returned to him, and the memory of it went with him all the day that followed, but still he sa

nothing.

When on the third night he dreamed it yet again, even more vividly, then he was sure that this thing was from God, and summoned his holy Imauns and his Diviners, and took counsel with them. These after they had listened, prayed and consulted, spoke thus:

"O Sultan, Allah has warned you in shadows that the woman, your niece, who dwells far away in England, shall by her own nobleness and sacrifice, in some time to come, save you from shedding a sea of blood, and bring rest upon the land. We charge you, therefore, draw this lady to your court, and keep her ever by your side, since if she escape you, her peace goes with her."

Salah-ed-din said that this interpretation was wise and true, for thus also he had read his dream. Then he summoned a certain false knight who bore the Cross upon his breast, but in secret had accepted the Koran, a Frankish spy of his, who came from that country where dwelt the maiden, his niece, and from him learned about her, her father, and her home. With him and another spy who passed as a Christian palmer, by the aid of Prince Hassan, one of the greatest and most trusted of his Emirs, he made a cunning plan for the capture of the maiden if she would not come willingly, and for her bearing away to Syria.

Moreover—that in the eyes of all men her dignity might be worthy of her high blood and fate—by his decree he created her, the niece whom he had never seen, Princess of Baalbec, with great possessions—a rule that her grandfather, Ayoub, and her uncle, Izzeddin, had held before her. Also he purchased a stout galley of war, manning it with proved sailors and with chosen men-at-arms, under the command of the Prince Hassan, and wrote a letter to the English lord, Sir Andrew D'Arcy, and to his daughter, and prepared a royal gift of jewels, and sent them to the lady, his niece, far away in England, and with it the Patent of her rank. Her he commanded this company to win by peace, or force, or fraud, as best they might, but that without her not one of them should dare to look upon his face again. And with these he sent the two Frankish spies, who knew the place where the lady lived, one of whom, the false knight, was a skilled mariner and the captain of the ship.

These things did Yusuf Salah-ed-din, and waited patiently till it should please God to accomplish the vision with which God had filled his soul in sleep.

Chapter One - *By the Waters of Death Creek*

*

From the sea-wall on the coast of Essex, Rosamund looked out across the ocean eastwards. To right and left, but a little behind her, like guards attending the person of their sovereign, stood her cousin and the twin brethren, Godwin and Wulf, tall and shapely men. Godwin was still as a statue, his hands folded over the hilt of the long, scabbarded sword, of which the point was set on the ground before him, but Wulf, his brother, moved restlessly, and at length yawned aloud. They were beautiful to look at, all three of them, as they appeared in the splendour of their youth and health. The imperious Rosamund, dark-haired and eyed, ivory skinned and slender-waisted, a posy of marsh flowers in her hand; the pale, stately Godwin, with his dreaming face; and the bold-fronted, blue-eyed warrior, Wulf, Saxon to his finger-tips, notwithstanding his father's Norman blood.

At the sound of that unstifled yawn, Rosamund turned her head with the slow grace which marked her every movement.

"Would you sleep already, Wulf, and the sun not yet down?" she asked in her rich, low voice, which perhaps because of its foreign accent, seemed quite different to that of any other woman.

"I think so, Rosamund," he answered. "It would serve to pass the time, and now that you have finished gathering those yellow flowers which we rode so far to seek, the time—is somewhat long."

"Shame on you, Wulf," she said, smiling. "Look upon yonder sea and sky, at that sheet of bloom a gold and purple—"

"I have looked for hard on half an hour, Cousin Rosamund; also at your back and at Godwin's left arm and side-face, till in truth I thought myself kneeling in Stangate Priory staring at my father's effigy upon his tomb, while Prior John pattered the Mass. Why, if you stood it on its feet, it is Godwin, the same crossed hands resting on the sword, the same cold, silent face staring at the sky."

"Godwin as Godwin will no doubt one day be, or so he hopes—that is, if the saints give him grace to do such deeds as did our sire," interrupted his brother.

Wulf looked at him, and a curious flash of inspiration shone in his blue eyes.

"No, I think not," he answered; "the deeds you may do, and greater, but surely you will lie wrapped not in a shirt of mail, but with a monk's cowl at the last—unless a woman robs you of it and the quickest road to heaven. Tell me now, what are you thinking of, you two—for I have been wondering in my dull way, and am curious to learn how far I stand from truth? Rosamund, speak first. Nay, not all the truth—a maid's thoughts are her own—but just the cream of it, that which rises to the top and should be skimmed."

Rosamund sighed. "I? I was thinking of the East, where the sun shines ever and the seas are blue as many girdle stones, and men are full of strange learning—"

"And women are men's slaves!" interrupted Wulf. "Still, it is natural that you should think of the East who have that blood in your veins, and high blood, if all tales be true. Say, Princess"—and he bowed the knee to her with an affectation of mockery which could not hide his earnest reverence—"say, Princess, my cousin, granddaughter of Ayoub and niece of the mighty monarch, Yusuf Salah-ed-din, do you wish to leave this pale land and visit your dominions in Egypt and in Syria?"

She listened, and at his words her eyes seemed to take fire, the stately form to erect itself, the breast to heave, and the thin nostrils to grow wider as though they scented some sweet, remembered perfume. Indeed, at that moment, standing there on the promontory above the seas, Rosamund looked a very queen.

Presently she answered him with another question.

"And how would they greet me there, Wulf, who am a Norman D'Arcy and a Christian maid?"

"The first they would forgive you, since that blood is none so ill either, and for the second—where faiths can be changed."

Then it was that Godwin spoke for the first time.

"Wulf, Wulf," he said sternly, "keep watch upon your tongue, for there are things that should not be said even as a silly jest. See you, I love my cousin here better than aught else upon the earth—"

"There, at least, we agree," broke in Wulf.

"Better than aught else on the earth," repeated Godwin; "but, by the Holy Blood and by St. Peter, whose shrine we are, I would kill her with my own hand before her lips kissed the book of the false prophet."

"Or any of his followers," muttered Wulf to himself, but fortunately, perhaps, too low for either of his companions to hear. Aloud he said, "You understand, Rosamund, you must be careful, for Godwin ever keeps his word, and that would be but a poor end for so much birth and beauty and wisdom."

"Oh, cease mocking, Wulf," she answered, laying her hand lightly on the tunic that hid his shirt of mail. "Cease mocking, and pray St. Chad, the builder of this church, that no such dreadful choice may ever be forced upon you, or me, or your beloved brother—who, indeed, in such a case would do right to slay me."

"Well, if it were," answered Wulf, and his fair face flushed as he spoke, "I trust that we should know how to meet it. After all, is it so very hard to choose between death and duty?"

"I know not," she replied; "but oft-times sacrifice seems easy when seen from far away; also, things may be lost that are more prized than life."

"What things? Do you mean place, or wealth, or—love?"

"Tell me," said Rosamund, changing her tone, "what is that boat rowing round the river's mouth? while ago it hung upon its oars as though those within it watched us."

"Fisher-folk," answered Wulf carelessly. "I saw their nets."

"Yes; but beneath them something gleamed bright, like swords."

"Fish," said Wulf; "we are at peace in Essex." Although Rosamund did not look convinced, he went on: "Now for Godwin's thoughts— what were they?"

"Brother, if you would know, of the East also—the East and its wars."

"Which have brought us no great luck," answered Wulf, "seeing that our sire was slain in them and naught of him came home again save his heart, which lies at Stangate yonder."

"How better could he die," asked Godwin, "than fighting for the Cross of Christ? Is not that death his at Harenc told of to this day? By our Lady, I pray for one but half as glorious!"

"Aye, he died well—he died well," said Wulf, his blue eyes flashing and his hand creeping to his sword hilt. "But, brother, there is peace at Jerusalem, as in Essex."

"Peace? Yes; but soon there will be war again. The monk Peter—he whom we saw at Stangate last Sunday, and who left Syria but six months gone—told me that it was coming fast. Even now the Sultan Saladin, sitting at Damascus, summons his hosts from far and wide, while his priests preach battle amongst the tribes and barons of the East. And when it comes, brother, shall we not be there to share it, as were our grandfather, our father, our uncle, and so many of our kin? Shall we rot here in this dull land, as by our uncle's wish we have done these many years, yes, ever since we were home from the Scottish war, and count the kine and plough the fields like peasants, while our peers are charging on the pagan, and the banners wave, and the blood runs red upon the holy sands of Palestine?"

Now it was Wulf's turn to take fire.

"By our Lady in Heaven, and our lady here!"—and he looked at Rosamund, who was watching the pair of them with her quiet thoughtful eyes—"go when you will, Godwin, and I go with you, and as our birth was one birth, so, if it is decreed, let our death be one death." And suddenly his hand that had been playing with the sword-hilt gripped it fast, and tore the long, lean blade from its scabbard and cast it high into the air, flashing in the sunlight, to catch it as it fell again, while in a voice that caused the wild fowl to rise in thunder from the Saltings beneath, Wulf shouted the old war-cry that had rung on so many a field—"A D'Arcy! a D'Arcy! Meet D'Arcy, meet Death!" Then he sheathed his sword again and added in a shamed voice, "Are we children that we fight where no foe is? Still, brother, may we find him soon!"

Godwin smiled grimly, but answered nothing; only Rosamund said:

"So, my cousins, you would be away, perhaps to return no more, and that will part us. But"—and her voice broke somewhat—"such is the woman's lot, since men like you ever love the bare sword best of all, nor should I think well of you were it otherwise. Yet, cousins, I know not why"—and she shivered a little—"it comes into my heart that Heaven often answers such prayers swiftly. Oh, Wulf! your sword looked very red in the sunlight but now: I say that it looked very red in the sunlight. I am afraid—of I know not what. Well, we must be going, for we have nine miles to ride, and the dark is not so

far away. But first, my cousins, come with me into this shrine, and let us pray St. Peter and St. Chad guard us on our journey home."

"Our journey?" said Wulf anxiously. "What is there for you to fear in a nine-mile ride along the shore of the Blackwater?"

"I said our journey home Wulf; and home is not in the hall at Steeple, but yonder," and she pointed to the quiet, brooding sky.

"Well answered," said Godwin, "in this ancient place, whence so many have journeyed home; all the Romans who are dead, when it was their fortress, and the Saxons who came after them, and others without count."

Then they turned and entered the old church—one of the first that ever was in Britain, rough-built Roman stone by the very hands of Chad, the Saxon saint, more than five hundred years before the day. Here they knelt a while at the rude altar and prayed, each of them in his or her own fashion, then crossed themselves, and rose to seek their horses, which were tied in the shed hard by.

Now there were two roads, or rather tracks, back to the Hall at Steeple—one a mile or so inland, that ran through the village of Bradwell, and the other, the shorter way, along the edge of the Saltings to the narrow water known as Death Creek, at the head of which the traveller to Steeple must strike inland, leaving the Priory of Stangate on his right. It was this latter path they chose, since at low tide the going there is good for horses—which, even in the summer, that of the inland track was not. Also they wished to be at home by supper-time, lest the old knight, Sir Andrew D'Arcy, the father of Rosamund and the uncle of the orphan brethren, should grow anxious, and perhaps come out to seek them.

For the half of an hour or more they rode along the edge of the Saltings, for the most part in silence that was broken only by the cry of curlew and the lap of the turning tide. No human being did they see indeed, for this place was very desolate and unvisited, save now and again by fishermen. At length just as the sun began to sink, they approached the shore of Death Creek—a sheet of tidal water which ran a mile or more inland, growing ever narrower, but was here some three hundred yards in breadth. They were well mounted, all three of them. Indeed, Rosamund's horse, a great grey, her father's gift to her, was famous in that country-side for its swiftness and power, also because it was so docile that a child could ride it; while those of the brethren were heavy-built but well-trained war steeds, taught to stand where they were left, and to charge when they were urged, without fear of shouting men or flashing steel.

Now the ground lay thus. Some seventy yards from the shore of Death Creek and parallel to it, a tongue of land, covered with scrub and a few oaks, ran down into the Saltings, its point ending on the path, beyond which were a swamp and the broad river. Between this tongue and the shore of the creek the track wended its way to the uplands. It was an ancient track; indeed the reason of its existence was that here the Romans or some other long dead hands had built a narrow mole or quay of rough stone forty or fifty yards in length, out into the water of the creek, doubtless to serve as a convenience for fisher boats, which could lie alongside of it even at low tide. This mole had been much destroyed by centuries of washing, so that the end of it lay below water, although the landward part was still almost sound and level.

Coming over the little rise at the top of the wooded tongue, the quick eyes of Wulf, who rode first—~~for here the path along the border of the swamp was so narrow that they must go in single file~~—caught sight of a large, empty boat moored to an iron ring set in the wall of the mole.

"Your fishermen have landed, Rosamund," he said, "and doubtless gone up to Bradwell."

"That is strange," she answered anxiously, "since here no fishermen ever come." And she checked her horse as though to turn.

"Whether they come or not, certainly they have gone," said Godwin, craning forward to look about him; "so, as we have nothing to fear from an empty boat, let us push on."

On they rode accordingly, until they came to the root of the stone quay or pier, when a sound behind them caused them to look back. Then they saw a sight that sent the blood to their hearts, for the men behind them, leaping down one by one on to that narrow footway, were men armed with naked swords. Six or eight of them, all of whom, they noted, had strips of linen pierced with eyelet holes tied beneath their helms or leather caps, so as to conceal their faces.

"A snare! a snare!" cried Wulf, drawing his sword. "Swift! follow me up the Bradwell path!" and he struck the spurs into his horse. It bounded forward, to be dragged next second with all the weight of his powerful arm almost to its haunches. "God's mercy!" he cried, "there are more of them!" And more there were, for another band of men armed and linen-hooded like the first, had leapt down on to the Bradwell path, amongst them a stout man, who seemed to be unarmed, except for a long, crooked knife at his girdle and a coat of ringed mail, which showed through the opening of his loose tunic.

"To the boat!" shouted Godwin, whereat the stout man laughed—a light, penetrating laugh, which even then all three of them heard and noted.

Along the quay they rode, since there was nowhere else that they could go, with both paths barred, and swamp and water on one side of them, and a steep, wooded bank upon the other. When they reached the boat they found why the man had laughed, for the boat was made fast with a strong chain that could not be cut; more, her sail and oars were gone.

"Get into it," mocked a voice; "or, at least, let the lady get in; it will save us the trouble of carrying her there."

Now Rosamund turned very pale, while the face of Wulf went red and white, and he gripped his sword-hilt. But Godwin, calm as ever, rode forward a few paces, and said quietly:

"Of your courtesy, say what you need of us. If it be money, we have none—nothing but our arms and horses, which I think may cost you dear."

Now the man with the crooked knife advanced a little, accompanied by another man, a tall, supple-looking knave, into whose ear he whispered.

"My master says," answered the tall man, "that you have with you that which is of more value than all the king's gold—a very fair lady, of whom someone has urgent need. Give her up now, and go your way with your arms and horses, for you are gallant young men, whose blood we do not wish to shed."

At this it was the turn of the brethren to laugh, which both of them did together.

"Give her up," answered Godwin, "and go our ways dishonoured? Aye, with our breath, but not before. Who then has such urgent need of the lady Rosamund?"

Again there was whispering between the pair.

"My master says," was the answer, "he thinks that all who see her will have need of her, since such loveliness is rare. But if you wish a name, well, one comes into his mind; the name of the knight Lozelle."

"The knight Lozelle!" murmured Rosamund, turning even paler than before, as well she might. For this Lozelle was a powerful man and Essex-born. He owned ships of whose doings upon the seas and in the East evil tales were told, and once had sought Rosamund's hand in marriage, but being rejected uttered threats for which Godwin, as the elder of the twins, had fought and wounded him. Then he vanished—none knew where.

"Is Sir Hugh Lozelle here then?" asked Godwin, "masked like you common cowards? If so, I desire to meet him, to finish the work I began in the snow last Christmas twelvemonths."

"Find that out if you can," answered the tall man. But Wulf said, speaking low between his clenched teeth:

"Brother, I see but one chance. We must place Rosamund between us and charge them."

The captain of the band seemed to read their thoughts, for again he whispered into the ear of his companion, who called out:

"My master says that if you try to charge, you will be fools, since we shall stab and ham-string your horses, which are too good to waste, and take you quite easily as you fall. Come then, yield, as you can do without shame, seeing there is no escape, and that two men, however brave, cannot stand against a crowd. He gives you one minute to surrender."

Now Rosamund spoke for the first time.

"My cousins," she said, "I pray you not to let me fall living into the hands of Sir Hugh Lozelle, or yonder men, to be taken to what fate I know not. Let Godwin kill me, then, to save my honour, as he now he said he would to save my soul, and strive to cut your way through, and live to avenge me."

The brethren made no answer, only they looked at the water and then at one another, and nodded. It was Godwin who spoke again, for now that it had come to this struggle for life and their lady, Wulf whose tongue was commonly so ready, had grown strangely silent, and fierce-faced also.

"Listen, Rosamund, and do not turn your eyes," said Godwin. "There is but one chance for you, and poor as it is, you must choose between it and capture, since we cannot kill you. The grey horse you ride is strong and true. Turn him now, and spur into the water of Death Creek and swim it. It is broad but the incoming tide will help you, and perchance you will not drown."

Rosamund listened and moved her head backwards towards the boat. Then Wulf spoke—few words

and sharp: "Begone, girl! we guard the boat."

She heard, and her dark eyes filled with tears, and her stately head sank for a moment almost to the horse's mane.

"Oh, my knights! my knights! And would you die for me? Well, if God wills it, so it must be. But I swear that if you die, that no man shall be aught to me who have your memory, and if you live—" And she looked at them confusedly, then stopped.

"Bless us, and begone," said Godwin.

So she blessed them in words low and holy; then of a sudden wheeled round the great grey horse, and striking the spur into its flank, drove straight at the deep water. A moment the stallion hung, then from the low quay-end sprang out wide and clear. Deep it sank, but not for long, for presently its rider's head rose above the water, and regaining the saddle, from which she had floated, Rosamund sat firm and headed the horse straight for the distant bank. Now a shout of wonderment went up from the woman thieves, for this was a deed that they had never thought a girl would dare. But the brethren laughed as they saw that the grey swam well, and, leaping from their saddles, ran forward a few paces—eight or ten—along the mole to where it was narrowest, as they went tearing the cloaks from the shoulders, and, since they had none, throwing them over their left arms to serve as bucklers.

The band cursed sullenly, only their captain gave an order to his spokesman, who cried aloud:

"Cut them down, and to the boat! We shall take her before she reaches shore or drowns."

For a moment they wavered, for the tall twin warriors who barred the way had eyes that told of wounds and death. Then with a rush they came, scrambling over the rough stones. But here the causeway was so narrow that while their strength lasted, two men were as good as twenty, nor, because of the mud and water, could they be got at from either side. So after all it was but two to two, and the brethren were the better two. Their long swords flashed and smote, and when Wulf's was lifted again once more it shone red as it had been when he tossed it high in the sunlight, and a man fell with a heavy splash into the waters of the creek, and wallowed there till he died. Godwin's foe was down also, and, as it seemed, sped.

Then, at a muttered word, not waiting to be attacked by others, the brethren sprang forward. The huddled mob in front of them saw them come, and shrank back, but before they had gone a yard, their swords were at work behind. They swore strange oaths, they caught their feet among the rocks, and rolled upon their faces. In their confusion three of them were pushed into the water, where two sank in the mud and were drowned, the third only dragging himself ashore, while the rest made good their escape from the causeway. But two had been cut down, and three had fallen, for whom there was no escape. They strove to rise and fight, but the linen masks flapped about their eyes, so that their blows went wide, while the long swords of the brothers smote and smote again upon their helms and harness as the hammers of smiths smite upon an anvil, until they rolled over silent and stirless.

"Back!" said Godwin; "for here the road is wide; and they will get behind us."

So back they moved slowly, with their faces to the foe, stopping just in front of the first man whom Godwin had seemed to kill, and who lay face upwards with arms outstretched.

"So far we have done well," said Wulf, with a short laugh. "Are you hurt?"

"Nay," answered his brother, "but do not boast till the battle is over, for many are left and they will come on thus no more. Pray God they have no spears or bows."

Then he turned and looked behind him, and there, far from the shore now, swam the grey horse steadily, and there upon its back sat Rosamund. Yes, and she had seen, since the horse must swim somewhat sideways with the tide, for look, she took the kerchief from her throat and waved it to them. Then the brethren knew that she was proud of their great deeds, and thanked the saints that they had lived to do even so much as this for her dear sake.

Godwin was right. Although their leader commanded them in a stern voice, the band sank from the reach of those awful swords, and, instead, sought for stones to hurl at them. But here lay more mud than pebbles, and the rocks of which the causeway was built were too heavy for them to lift, so that they found but few, which when thrown either missed the brethren or did them little hurt. Now, after some while, the man called "master" spoke through his lieutenant, and certain of them ran into the thorn thicket, and thence appeared again bearing the long oars of the boat.

"Their counsel is to batter us down with the oars. What shall we do now, brother?" asked Godwin.

"What we can," answered Wulf. "It matters little if Rosamund is spared by the waters, for they will scarcely take her now, who must lose the boat and man it after we are dead."

As he spoke Wulf heard a sound behind him, and of a sudden Godwin threw up his arms and sank on his knees. Round he sprang, and there upon his feet stood that man whom they had thought dead, and in his hand a bloody sword. At him leapt Wulf, and so fierce were the blows he smote that the first severed his sword arm and the second shore through cloak and mail deep into the thief's side; so that this time he fell, never to stir again. Then he looked at his brother and saw that the blood was running down his face and blinding him.

"Save yourself, Wulf, for I am sped," murmured Godwin.

"Nay, or you could not speak." And he cast his arm round him and kissed him on the brow.

Then a thought came into his mind, and lifting Godwin as though he were a child, he ran back to where the horses stood, and heaved him onto the saddle.

"Hold fast!" he cried, "by mane and pommel. Keep your mind, and hold fast, and I will save you yet."

Passing the reins over his left arm, Wulf leapt upon the back of his own horse, and turned it. Ten seconds more, and the pirates, who were gathering with the oars where the paths joined at the root of the causeway, saw the two great horses thundering down upon them. On one a sore wounded man, his bright hair dabbled with blood, his hands gripping mane and saddle, and on the other the warrior Wulf with starting eyes and a face like the face of a flame, shaking his red sword, and for the second time that day shouting aloud: "A D'Arcy! a D'Arcy! Contre D'Arcy, contre Mort!"

They saw, they shouted, they massed themselves together and held up the oars to meet them. But Wulf spurred fiercely, and, short as was the way, the heavy horses, trained to tourney, gathered their speed

Now they were on them. The oars were swept aside like reeds; all round them flashed the swords, and Wulf felt that he was hurt, he knew not where. But his sword flashed also, one blow—there was no time for more—yet the man beneath it sank like an empty sack.

By St. Peter! They were through, and Godwin still swayed upon the saddle, and yonder, nearing the further shore, the grey horse with its burden still battled in the tide. They were through! they were through! while to Wulf's eyes the air swam red, and the earth seemed as though it rose up to meet them, and everywhere was flaming fire.

But the shouts had died away behind them, and the only sound was the sound of the galloping of the horses' hoofs. Then that also grew faint and died away, and silence and darkness fell upon the mind of Wulf.

Chapter Two - Sir Andrew D'Arcy

*

Godwin dreamed that he was dead, and that beneath him floated the world, a glowing ball, while he was borne to and fro through the blackness, stretched upon a couch of ebony. There were bright watchers by his couch also, watchers twain, and he knew them for his guardian angels, given him at birth. Moreover, now and again presences would come and question the watchers who sat at his head and foot. One asked:

"Has this soul sinned?" And the angel at his head answered:

"It has sinned."

Again the voice asked: "Did it die shriven of its sins?"

The angel answered: "It died unshriven, red sword aloft, fighting a good fight."

"Fighting for the Cross of Christ?"

"Nay; fighting for a woman."

"Alas! poor soul, sinful and unshriven, who died fighting for a woman's love. How shall such a one find mercy?" wailed the questioning voice, growing ever fainter, till it was lost far, far away.

Now came another visitor. It was his father—the warrior sire whom he had never seen, who fell in Syria. Godwin knew him well, for the face was the face carven on the tomb in Stangate church, and he wore the blood-red cross upon his mail, and the D'Arcy Death's-head was on his shield, and in his hand shone a naked sword.

"Is this the soul of my son?" he asked of the whiterobed watchers. "If so, how died he?"

Then the angel at his foot answered: "He died, red sword aloft, fighting a good fight."

"Fighting for the Cross of Christ?"

"Nay; fighting for a woman."

"Fighting for a woman's love who should have fallen in the Holy War? Alas! poor son; alas! poor son! Alas! that we must part again forever!" and his voice, too, passed away.

Lo! a Glory advanced through the blackness, and the angels at head and foot stood up and saluted with their flaming spears.

"How died this child of God?" asked a voice, speaking out of the Glory, a low and awful voice.

"He died by the sword," answered the angel.

"By the sword of the children of the enemy, fighting in the war of Heaven?"

Then the angels were silent.

"What has Heaven to do with him, if he fought not for Heaven?" asked the voice again.

"Let him be spared," pleaded the guardians, "who was young and brave, and knew not. Send him back to earth, there to retrieve his sins and be our charge once more."

"So be it," said the voice. "Knight, live on, but live as a knight of Heaven if thou wouldst win Heaven."

"Must he then put the woman from him?" asked the angels.

"It was not said," answered the voice speaking from the Glory. And all that wild vision vanished.

Then a space of oblivion, and Godwin awoke to hear other voices around him, voices human, well-beloved, remembered; and to see a face bending over him—a face most human, most well-beloved, most remembered—that of his cousin Rosamund. He babbled some questions, but they brought him food, and told him to sleep, so he slept. Thus it went on, waking and sleep, sleep and waking, till length one morning he woke up truly in the little room that opened out of the solar or sitting place—the Hall of Steeple, where he and Wulf had slept since their uncle took them to his home as infants. More, on the trestle bed opposite to him, his leg and arm bandaged, and a crutch by his side, sat Wulf himself, somewhat paler and thinner than of yore, but the same jovial, careless, yet at times fierce-faced Wulf.

"Do I still dream, my brother, or is it you indeed?"

A happy smile spread upon the face of Wulf, for now he knew that Godwin was himself again.

"Me sure enough," he answered. "Dream-folk don't have lame legs; they are the gifts of swords and men."

"And Rosamund? What of Rosamund? Did the grey horse swim the creek, and how came we here? Tell me quick—I faint for news!"

"She shall tell you herself." And hobbling to the curtained door, he called, "Rosamund, my—nay, our—cousin Rosamund, Godwin is himself again. Hear you, Godwin is himself again, and would speak with you!"

There was a swift rustle of robes and a sound of quick feet among the rushes that strewed the floor, and then—Rosamund herself, lovely as ever, but all her stateliness forgot in joy. She saw him, the gaunt Godwin sitting up upon the pallet, his grey eyes shining in the white and sunken face. For Godwin's eyes were grey, while Wulf's were blue, the only difference between them which a stranger would note, although in truth Wulf's lips were fuller than Godwin's, and his chin more marked; also he was a larger man. She saw him, and with a little cry of delight ran and cast her arms about him, and kissed him on the brow.

"Be careful," said Wulf roughly, turning his head aside, "or, Rosamund, you will loose the bandages and bring his trouble back again; he has had enough of blood-letting."

"Then I will kiss him on the hand—the hand that saved me," she said, and did so. More, she pressed that poor, pale hand against her heart.

"Mine had something to do with that business also but I don't remember that you kissed it, Rosamund. Well, I will kiss him too, and oh! God be praised, and the holy Virgin, and the holy Peter, and the holy Chad, and all the other holy dead folk whose names I can't recall, who between them, with the help of Rosamund here, and the prayers of the Prior John and brethren at Stangate, and of Matthew, the village priest, have given you back to us, my brother, my most beloved brother." And he hopped to the bedside, and throwing his long, sinewy arms about Godwin embraced him again and again.

"Be careful," said Rosamund drily, "or, Wulf, you will disturb the bandages, and he has had enough of blood-letting."

Then before he could answer, which he seemed minded to do, there came the sound of a slow step, and swinging the curtain aside, a tall and noble-looking knight entered the little place. The man was old but looked older than he was, for sorrow and sickness had wasted him. His snow-white hair hung upon his shoulders, his face was pale, and his features were pinched but finely-chiselled, and notwithstanding the difference of their years, wonderfully like to those of the daughter Rosamund. For this was her father, the famous lord, Sir Andrew D'Arcy.

Rosamund turned and bent the knee to him with a strange and Eastern grace, while Wulf bowed his head, and Godwin, since his neck was too stiff to stir, held up his hand in greeting. The old man looked at him, and there was pride in his eye.

"So you will live after all, my nephew," he said, "and for that I thank the giver of life and death, since by God, you are a gallant man—a worthy child of the bloods of the Norman D'Arcy and of Uluin the Saxon. Yes, one of the best of them."

"Speak not so, my uncle," said Godwin; "or at least, here is a worthier,"—and he patted the hand of Wulf with his lean fingers. "It was Wulf who bore me through. Oh, I remember as much as that—how he lifted me onto the black horse and bade me to cling fast to mane and pommel. Ay, and I remember the charge, and his cry of 'Contre D'Arcy, contre Mort!' and the flashing of swords about us, and after that—nothing."

"Would that I had been there to help in that fight," said Sir Andrew D'Arcy, tossing his white hair. "Oh, my children, it is hard to be sick and old. A log am I—naught but a rotting log. Still, had I only been known—"

"Father, father," said Rosamund, casting her white arm about his neck. "You should not speak thus. You have done your share."

"Yes, my share; but I should like to do more. Oh, St. Andrew, ask it for me that I may die with sword aloft and my grandsire's cry upon my lips. Yes, yes; thus, not like a worn-out war-horse in his stall. There, pardon me; but in truth, my children, I am jealous of you. Why, when I found you lying in each other's arms I could have wept for rage to think that such a fray had been within a league of my own

doors and I not in it."

"I know nothing of all that story," said Godwin.

"No, in truth, how can you, who have been senseless this month or more? But Rosamund knows, and she shall tell it you. Speak on, Rosamund. Lay you back, Godwin, and listen."

"The tale is yours, my cousins, and not mine," said Rosamund. "You bade me take the water, and into it I spurred the grey horse, and we sank deep, so that the waves closed above my head. Then up we came, I floating from the saddle, but I regained it, and the horse answered to my voice and bridle, and swam out for the further shore. On it swam, somewhat slantwise with the tide, so that by turning my head I could see all that passed upon the mole. I saw them come at you, and men fall before your swords; I saw you charge them, and run back again. Lastly, after what seemed a very long while, when I was far away, I saw Wulf lift Godwin into the saddle—I knew it must be Godwin, because he set him on the black horse—and the pair of you galloped down the quay and vanished.

"By then I was near the home shore, and the grey grew very weary and sank deep in the water. But I cheered it on with my voice, and although twice its head went beneath the waves, in the end it found footing, though a soft one. After resting awhile, it plunged forward with short rushes through the mud, and so at length came safe to land, where it stood shaking with fear and weariness. So soon as the horse got its breath again, I pressed on, for I saw them loosing the boat, and came home here as the dark closed in, to meet your uncle watching for me at the gate. Now, father, do you take up the tale."

"There is little more to tell," said Sir Andrew. "You will remember, nephews, that I was against the ride of Rosamund's to seek flowers, or I know not what, at St. Peter's shrine, nine miles away, but the maid had set her heart on it, and there are but few pleasures here, why, I let her go with the pair of you for escort. You will mind also that you were starting without your mail, and how foolish you thought me when I called you back and made you gird it on. Well, my patron saint—or yours—put it into my head to do so, for had it not been for those same shirts of mail, you were both of you dead men to-day. But that morning I had been thinking of Sir Hugh Lozelle—if such a false, pirate rogue can be called a knight, not but that he is stout and brave enough—and his threats after he recovered from the wound you gave him, Godwin; how that he would come back and take your cousin for all we could do to stay him. True, we heard that he had sailed for the East to war against Saladin—or with him, for he was ever a traitor—but even if this were so, men return from the East. Therefore I bade you arm, having some foresight of what was to come, for doubtless this onslaught must have been planned by him."

"I think so," said Wulf, "for, as Rosamund here knows, the tall knave who interpreted for the foreigners whom he called his master, gave us the name of the knight Lozelle as the man who sought to carry her off."

"Was this master a Saracen?" asked Sir Andrew, anxiously.

"Nay, uncle, how can I tell, seeing that his face was masked like the rest and he spoke through an interpreter? But I pray you go on with the story, which Godwin has not heard."

"It is short. When Rosamund told her tale of which I could make little, for the girl was crazed with grief and cold and fear, save that you had been attacked upon the old quay, and she had escaped to

swimming Death Creek—which seemed a thing incredible—I got together what men I could. ~~The bidding her stay behind, with some of them to guard her, and nurse herself, which she was loth to do,~~ set out to find you or your bodies. It was dark, but we rode hard, having lanterns with us, as we were rousing men at every stead, until we came to where the roads join at Moats. There we found a black horse—your horse, Godwin—so badly wounded that he could travel no further, and I groaned thinking that you were dead. Still we went on, till we heard another horse whinny, and presently found the roan also riderless, standing by the path-side with his head down.

"A man on the ground holds him!" cried one, and I sprang from the saddle to see who it might be, to find that it was you, the pair of you, locked in each other's arms and senseless, if not dead, as well you might be from your wounds. I bade the country-folk cover you up and carry you home, and others ran to Stangate and pray the Prior and the monk Stephen, who is a doctor, come at once to tend you while we pressed onwards to take vengeance if we could. We reached the quay upon the creek, but there we found nothing save some bloodstains and—this is strange—your sword, Godwin, the hilt split between two stones, and on the point a writing."

"What was the writing?" asked Godwin.

"Here it is," answered his uncle, drawing a piece of parchment from his robe. "Read it, one of you, since all of you are scholars and my eyes are bad."

Rosamund took it and read what was written, hurriedly but in a clerkly hand, and in the French tongue. It ran thus: "The sword of a brave man. Bury it with him if he be dead, and give it back to him if he lives, as I hope. My master would wish me to do this honour to a gallant foe whom in that case he still may meet. (Signed) Hugh Lozelle, or Another."

"Another, then; not Hugh Lozelle," said Godwin, "since he cannot write, and if he could, would never have written such pen words so knightly."

"The words may be knightly, but the writer's deeds were base enough," replied Sir Andrew; "nor, in truth do I understand this scroll."

"The interpreter spoke of the short man as his master," suggested Wulf.

"Ay, nephew; but him you met. This writing speaks of a master whom Godwin may meet, and whom he would wish the writer to pay him a certain honour."

"Perhaps he wrote thus to blind us."

"Perchance, perchance. The matter puzzles me. Moreover, of whom these men were I have been able to learn nothing. A boat was seen passing towards Bradwell—indeed, it seems that you saw it, and that on the night a boat was seen sailing southwards down St. Peter's sands towards a ship that had anchored off Foulness Point. But what that ship was, whence she came, and whither she went, none know, though the tidings of this fray have made some stir."

"Well," said Wulf, "at the least we have seen the last of her crew of women-thieves. Had they meant more mischief, they would have shown themselves again ere now."

Sir Andrew looked grave as he answered.

"So I trust, but all the tale is very strange. How came they to know that you and Rosamund were riding that day to St. Peter's-on-the-Wall, and so were able to waylay you? Surely some spy must have warned them, since that they were no common pirates is evident, for they spoke of Lozelle, and bade you two begone unharmed, as it was Rosamund whom they needed. Also, there is the matter of the sword that fell from the hand of Godwin when he was hurt, which was returned in so strange a fashion. I have known many such deeds of chivalry done in the East by Paynim men—"

"Well, Rosamund is half an Eastern," broke in Wulf carelessly; "and perhaps that had something to do with it all."

Sir Andrew started, and the colour rose to his pale face. Then in a tone in which he showed he wished to speak no more of this matter, he said:

"Enough, enough. Godwin is very weak, and grows weary, and before I leave him I have a word to say that it may please you both to hear. Young men, you are of my blood, the nearest to it except Rosamund—the sons of that noble knight, my brother. I have ever loved you well, and been proud of you, but if this was so in the past, how much more is it thus to-day, when you have done such high service to my house? Moreover, that deed was brave and great; nothing more knightly has been told of in Essex this many a year, and those who wrought it should no longer be simple gentlemen, but very knights. This boon it is in my power to grant to you according to the ancient custom. Still, that none may question it, while you lay sick, but after it was believed that Godwin would live, which at first we scarcely dared to hope, I journeyed to London and sought audience of our lord the king. Having told him this tale, I prayed him that he would be pleased to grant me his command in writing that I should name you knights.

"My nephews, he was so pleased, and here I have the brief sealed with the royal signet, commanding that in his name and my own I should give you the accolade publicly in the church of the Priory of Stangate at such season as may be convenient. Therefore, Godwin, the squire, haste you to get well, that you may become Sir Godwin the knight; for you, Wulf, save for the hurt to your leg, are well enough already."

Now Godwin's white face went red with pride, and Wulf dropped his bold eyes and looked modest as a girl.

"Speak you," he said to his brother, "for my tongue is blunt and awkward."

"Sir," said Godwin in a weak voice, "we do not know how to thank you for so great an honour, that we never thought to win till we had done more famous deeds than the beating off of a band of robbers. Sir, we have no more to say, save that while we live we will strive to be worthy of our name and of you."

"Well spoken," said his uncle, adding as though to himself, "this man is courtly as he is brave."

Wulf looked up, a flash of merriment upon his open face.

"I, my uncle, whose speech is, I fear me, not courtly, thank you also. I will add that I think our lac-

cousin here should be knighted too, if such a thing were possible for a woman, seeing that to swim horse across Death Creek was a greater deed than to fight some rascals on its quay."

"Rosamund?" answered the old man in the same dreamy voice. "Her rank is high enough—too high far too high for safety." And turning, he left the little chamber.

"Well, cousin," said Wulf, "if you cannot be a knight, at least you can lessen all this dangerous rank of yours by becoming a knight's wife." Whereat Rosamund looked at him with indignation which struggled with a smile in her dark eyes, and murmuring that she must see to the making of Godwin's broth, followed her father from the place.

"It would have been kinder had she told us that she was glad," said Wulf when she was gone.

"Perhaps she would," answered his brother, "had it not been for your rough jests, Wulf, which might have a meaning in them."

"Nay, I had no meaning. Why should she not become a knight's wife?"

"Ay, but what knight's? Would it please either of us, brother, if, as may well chance, he should be some stranger?"

Now Wulf swore a great oath, then flushed to the roots of his fair hair, and was silent.

"Ah!" said Godwin; "you do not think before you speak, which it is always well to do."

"She swore upon the quay yonder"—broke in Wulf.

"Forget what she swore. Words uttered in such an hour should not be remembered against a maid."

"God's truth, brother, you are right, as ever! My tongue runs away with me, but still I can't put those words out of my mind, though which of us—"

"Wulf!"

"I mean to say that we are in Fortune's path to-day, Godwin. Oh, that was a lucky ride! Such fighting as I have never seen or dreamed of. We won it too! And now both of us are alive, and a knighthood for each!"

"Yes, both of us alive, thanks to you, Wulf—nay, it is so, though you would never have done less. But as for Fortune's path, it is one that has many rough turns, and perhaps before all is done she may lead us round some of them."

"You talk like a priest, not like a squire who is to be knighted at the cost of a scar on his head. For my part I will kiss Fortune while I may, and if she jilts me afterwards—"

"Wulf," called Rosamund from without the curtain, "cease talking of kissing at the top of your voice, pray you, and leave Godwin to sleep, for he needs it." And she entered the little chamber, bearing a bowl of broth in her hand.

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