

# THE PELTANKE

H. Rider Haggard's Great  
Romance of the Crusades

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## CHAPTER II. (Continued.)

"A man on the ground holds him!" cried one, and I swung 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. I bade the country folk come up and carry you home, and bade them to run to Stangate and pray the Prior and the monk Stephen, who is a leech, come with speed. Well, you might be from your wounds, to tend you, while we pressed onwards to take vengeance if we might. We reached the quay upon the creek but there we found nothing save some blood-stains and a trail of footprints. You were gone, Godwin, the hill set between two stones, and on the point a writing.

"What was the writing?" asked Godwin.

"Here it is," answered the 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 clerical hand, and in the French tongue. It ran thus: "The sword of a brave man. Bury it within 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 pen words so knightly."

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

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

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

"Perhaps he wrote this 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 night a boat was seen sailing southwards down St. Peter's sands toward a ship that had anchored off Foulness Point. But what that ship was, whence it came, and whether 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 it that they knew that you and Rosamund were riding that day to St. Peter-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 to be on your guard, 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 Englishman," broke in Wulf earnestly, "and perhaps that had something to do with it all."

Sir Andrew started, and the color rose to his pale face.

"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 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 save this maid—the sons of a 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 true today, when you have shown 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 witness 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, I have one more thing to say, 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 liege 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 sign, commanding that in his name and my own I should give you the accolade payable in the church of the Priory at Stangate at such season as may be convenient. I have, Godwin, the square, haste you to get well, that you may become Sir Godwin the knight; for you, Wulf, save for the hurt to your leg, are already well served to swim a horse across Death Creek with 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, 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." Wherefore Rosamund looked at him with indignation which struggled with a smile in her dark eyes, and murmuring that she would 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?"

"Aye, but what knight's? Would it be her, not only in the heat of battle, as I have sworn, but in cold blood of set purpose if there were need. He loved her with body and with spirit, and after God, here to her consecrated his body and his spirit. But what value would she put upon the gift? What if some other man?"

By his side, his elbows resting on his knees, he looked at her with a look of intense grief. "It is so," he said quickly. "To my grief it is so. But she knows nothing of this, and should never know it if you will keep and waive upon your tongue. More over you need not be jealous of me, be for marriage or after."

"What, then, would you have me do?" asked Godwin again, with a sigh; "I might save her some pain and you some doubt, and make your own path more clear. A marriage more than then to me, Wulf, who think sometimes that my sword shall be my spouse and duty my only crown."

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"It is very fair," said Godwin; "and worthy of you, who are the most honest of men. Yet, Wulf, my heart is troubled. See you, my brother, have you not loved each other since we were boys? And now must the shadow of a woman fall upon love and light it, that is so fair and precious a thing?"

"Give me counsel, O my father, give me counsel."

"Your own heart is your best counsel," was the priest's answer. "Go as it guides you, knowing that through it is God who guides. Nor fear that you will regret your sins, they were but few. Should leave you, then come back, and we will talk again. Go on, pure knight of Christ, fearing nothing and sure of the glory of the state and arms, and the blessing of God and of his Church."

"What penance must I bear, father?"

"Such souls as yours inflict their own penance, and I forbid that you should add to it," was the gentle answer.

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