

The Blind Archer



In his stronghold at Sooneck, Siebold, one of the most rapacious of the robber barons, presided over a godless revel. Wanton women with showy apparel and painted cheeks lolled in the arms of tipsy cavaliers. The music blared, and to complete their carousal wine flowed freely. The lord of Sooneck, flushed with drinking and leering on the assembly with evil-looking eyes, spoke the following words:

“Noble ladies” - drunken applause from his worthy associates - “and much-married nobles” - loudly giggled the shameless females - “after food and drink, I, as your host, will be pleased to entertain you by bringing before you a ferocious animal which I keep confined in this castle.”

While the ladies pretended to timidly take shelter behind their lords and the men stared at their host expecting some further explanation, the doors of the hall opened, and two servants led a man in coarse garments and with unkempt hair and beard into the room. A suppressed whisper passed around the festive board,

and all eyes fixed on the haggard countenance of the prisoner. When for a moment the weary eyelids were raised, two ghastly cavities became visible. Again, and with the same tone of levity as before, the lord of the castle spoke: “Lovely ladies and knightly companions, the best marksman in all the Rhineland was Hans Veit von Fürsteneck, and like ourselves, he was dreaded far and near. We entered into a feud unto life or death. He went down.”

“With broken brand and battered shield, bleeding from numerous wounds, I lay prostrate before you, manfully awaiting the death-thrust,” murmured the prisoner, and his voice sounded as if it came from the grave. An uneasy silence began to fill the high hall.

“It pained me to finish him off,” said Siebold flip-pantly. “So I only had his two eyes gouged out, and thus added to my collection of rarities the best archer in all the Rhineland.”

“My murdered eyes behold your scorn,” the prisoner said harshly.

“But still there is chivalry in Castle Sooneck” said Lord Siebold. “Understand then that my servants have informed me that even though you are blind, you can, guided only by sound, hit any mark with a bolt. If you succeed in this test, then freedom shall be your reward.” Stormy applause greeted the words of Lord Siebold.

“Death is dearer to me than life,” murmured the blind archer. As he seized the crossbow, however, a gleam of joy spread over his countenance like a ray of sunshine bathes over a sombre landscape. Crowded together in one corner of the hall, the guests watched the proceedings. The lord of Sooneck seized a goblet and ordered the prisoner to draw upon the sound of it falling. The next moment the silver clang resounded as the goblet hit the stones of the floor.

“Shoot now,” said Siebold of Sooneck, and that same second an arrow pierced his mouth. With a grunt like a slaughtered ox, Siebold sank down in his blood. Silent and motionless, his two eye-cavities gaping, stood the blind man, and like a flock of frightened crows the knights and their paramours fled. Only a few terrified squires and servants muttered prayers over the body of the lord of Sooneck.