

Sigurd answered nothing, but walked on quickly. The man, seeing that he was determined to enter the town, followed cautiously and at a distance, waiting to see what might happen.

It was evening as Sigurd entered Jockjen. The little town, overshadowed by its grim fortress, was astir with unwonted bustle. For the king's marriage on the morrow had brought together many of the country people, who, though they loved not Ulf, loved a pageant, and a holiday to see it in. And besides them many soldiers were there who talked mysteriously at street corners, and seemed to have other business than merry-making on hand.

Sigurd passed unheeded through the streets, keeping his face hid in his cloak, and avoiding all points where the crowd seemed large or curious.

He was hastening thus stealthily down a by-street which led towards Niflheim, when he suddenly became aware of a small group of men before him, under the shadow of a high wall, in eager talk.

He halted, for, by their eager gestures and cautious looks, he judged them to be desperate men, whom it would be well for him to avoid rather than meet. Withdrawing quickly into a deeper shade, he waited with impatience till their conference should be over.

As he waited he heard them speak.

"By this time," said one, "he should have learned what is in store."

"Doubtless," said another. "Yet I am glad it was no earlier, for it will all be over before he can prevent it."

"Ulf once dead," said the first, "Sigurd cannot help being the king, however much he may dislike it."

"Nay, he dislikes not being king, but he is so foolishly tender about his brother."

The other laughed.

"There are others, I trust, will not be foolishly tender with his brother this night. At what hour is the deed to be done?"

"By midnight."

At this Sigurd, who had heard it all, could not refrain from starting where he stood.

The men heard him in an instant, and finding themselves thus discovered, rushed with one accord on the hero.

Before Sigurd could draw his sword or offer any resistance he was overpowered and held fast by his assailants, who, for fear he should cry aloud and alarm the town, threw a cloak over his head and led him off quickly to the castle.

Here, when the guards came out and inquired what it all meant, "This man," they said, "we know to be an enemy of the king's, who has come disguised to this town to do him some harm; keep him fast till the morning."

The guard, without so much as uncovering Sigurd's face, hurried him through the gate, and brought him to a dark dungeon, into which they thrust him, turning the key twice upon him.

Then Sigurd cast himself on the floor in despair.

To find himself thus confined, after all the fatigues he had suffered and all the perils he had escaped, was fearful indeed, the more so because he knew his brother was close at hand, and yet must die with no brotherly hand to help him. For himself he cared nought. The men who had cast him there called themselves his friends, and, as he knew, desired only to keep him fast, believing him to be a stranger who might disclose their plot. When all was over and Ulf dead, they would release him and perchance discover who he was.

Sigurd wished he might die before the morning.

But presently, as he lay, he heard a sound of feet on the pavement without approaching his dungeon.

The door slowly opened and a monk stood before him.

The hope that dawned in Sigurd's breast as the door opened faded again as a gruff voice without said,

"Do thy work quickly, father. A short shrift is all the villain deserves."

With that the door closed again, and Sigurd and the monk were left in darkness.

"I am to die, then?" asked the hero of the holy man.

"'Tis reported," said the monk, "you seek the king's life; therefore in the morning you are to die. But," added he, speaking lower, "you shall not die, my lord."

Sigurd started, not at the words, but at the voice that uttered them.

"Who art thou?" he whispered.

"One who owes thee his life, and would repay thee, my lord. I am he whom thou sparedst but lately in the wood."

In the dark Sigurd could not see his face, but he knew he spoke the truth.

"Quick," said the man, throwing off his gown and hood; "off with thy armour, my lord, and don these. There is no time to spare."

For a moment Sigurd paused, amazed at the man's offer. Then the thought of Ulf decided him.

"Brave friend," said he, "Heaven bless you for your aid. For four hours I accept thy deliverance and borrow my freedom. If before then I have not returned, call me a coward and a knave."

"Speak not of borrowing, my lord," said the man. "Heaven forbid I should require again the poor life thou thyself didst give me."

"Peace!" said Sigurd, quickly casting off his armour and covering himself in the monk's garb.

In a few moments the exchange was made. Then Sigurd, grasping the hand of his brave deliverer, pulled the hood low over his face, and stepped to the door and knocked.

The guard without unlocked the door, and as he did so the robber, crouching in a distant corner of the dungeon, clanked his arms and sighed.

"Ha, ha! brave monk," said the guard to Sigurd, laughingly. "This villain likes not your news, 'tis clear. You have done *your* task, the headsman shall soon do his."

Sigurd said nothing, but, with head bent and hands clasped, walked slowly from the cell and on towards the gate.

Here no man stopped him, but some more devout than the rest rendered obeisance, and crossed themselves as he passed.

Once out of the castle Sigurd breathed freely, and with thankful heart quickened his pace through the fast emptying streets in the direction of Niflheim.

A double care now pressed on him. The first on account of his brother's danger, the other lest he himself, in his efforts to save the king, should be detained, and so unable to keep faith with the brave man he had left in his place in the dungeon.

He therefore pressed on with all speed, unheeded by passers-by, to whom the sight of a monk hurrying on some mission of mercy was no strange thing.

In due time, in the dim twilight, the castle of Niflheim rose before him, and he felt that his journey was nearly done.

Late as it was, there was revelling going on in the palace. Knights and ladies crowded the halls, whilst without, in the outer rooms, persons of all degrees congregated to witness the festivities and share in the hospitalities of the royal bridegroom. For though Ulf was hated by all, some, either through fear or greediness, failed not to keep up a show of loyalty and even mirth in the royal presence.

Sigurd entered the palace unchallenged, and mingled