

For all this loyalty the king gave his brother little thanks. Indeed, as victory followed victory, and Sigurd's fame rose higher and higher, Ulf's heart swelled with jealousy, and jealousy presently grew to hate. For it was not in Ulf's nature to endure that another should be held greater than himself. So, instead of rewarding his brother for his service, he accused him and degraded him, and made another general in his place.

"Now," said the soldiers, "our chief will surely rebel, and we will follow his lead, and pluck down Ulf from the throne and set up our Sigurd."

But Sigurd sternly silenced them, and bade them serve their king as they feared him. He meanwhile departed sadly from his brother's court, and came and dwelt alone in his Tower of the North-West Wind.

For many weeks the time passed slowly, as Sigurd brooded over his wrongs and pined in idleness.

Yet this grieved him less than the secret visits of not a few of his old comrades, who had deserted Ulf, and now came begging him to lead them forth and rid the land of a tyrant. He sent them each sternly away, bidding them, on pain of his anger, return to their duty and serve the king; and they durst not disobey.

So passed many a weary month in the Tower of the North-West Wind, when one bright summer day a little fleet of English ships sailed gaily up the fiord under the castle walls.

Sigurd joyfully bade the voyagers welcome to his castle, for the chief of the little band was Rædwald, an English king, whom Sigurd himself only two years before had visited in his own land. There, too, he had met not Rædwald only, but Rædwald's beautiful daughter, who now, with her gay train of attendants, accompanied her father on this visit to his friend and comrade.

And now the days passed gaily and only too swiftly for the happy Sigurd. In the company of Rædwald and amid the smiles of the ladies, Ulf was forgotten, and all the wrongs of the past vanished. The Tower of the North-West Wind was no longer a gloomy fortress, but a gay palace, and, like the summer day in the northern heavens, the sun of Sigurd's content knew no setting.

Before the day of Rædwald's departure arrived a wedding had taken place in the chapel of the good old Tower, and the English king, as he hauled his anchors and set his sails westward, knew not whether to mourn over the daughter he had given up or to rejoice over the son he had gained.

As for Sigurd, he could do nothing but rejoice, and some who saw him and heard him laugh said, smiling,

"The queen his wife is a fairer sweetheart than was the king his brother. Ulf and our country and all of us are forgotten in the smiles of this little English maiden."

But three days after Rædwald had sailed a storm broke over the Tower of the North-West Wind. The summer sea lashed furiously against the rocks, and far up the fiord the angry breakers rushed in, so that no boat could live upon their surface for an hour.

That night as Sigurd sat heedless of the hurricane without and feasted with his lords and ladies, they came and told him that a raft had been driven ashore at the foot of the castle, with a man upon it half dead. Sigurd bade them instantly bring him to the castle, and give him fire and clothing and food, to revive him in his unhappy plight.

This they did, and presently came to the hero with the news that the man lived and desired to speak with his deliverer. So Sigurd ordered him to be brought up. And as the tempest raged without, his heart rejoiced to know that one man at least had been saved from its ravages.

The man was of the common order, and though clothed in a rough woodman's suit it was plain to see he was a soldier.

He fell at the feet of the prince and poured forth his thanks for the shelter given him that night.

"And who art thou?" asked Sigurd, to whom such thanks were never welcome.

"I am a servant of King Ulf thy brother."

At the mention of the king's name the faces of those present fell, and Sigurd asked, sternly,

"And what is thy errand here?"

"I was sent," said the man, "with two others, to spy into your state here. The king has heard of your merry-makings and of your alliance with the English king. He bade us see how you were armed and how prepared for a sudden assault, and then return secretly and report it to him."

"And is it thus you perform your errand?" cried Sigurd. "Where are thy companions?"

"Drowned, my liege, in the fiord, as I had been but for your gracious help."

"And when is the king coming to assault this tower?" demanded an English noble who sat near.

"Never," said the man, shortly.

"And why?" asked Sigurd.

"Oh, my liege," said the man, dropping once more on his knees, "please Heaven, in a week's time there will be no king in all this land but Sigurd."

The hero started from his seat and seized roughly on the speaker.

"What is it you say?" he cried. "Speak out, and that plainly, or it will be worse for you!"

"On this day week," said the trembling serf, "Ulf is to visit his castle of Nifheim. He goes there alone, as you, my liege, came hither, to receive his bride. But he will never return the way he came, for Bur and Harald, your friends, my prince, have vowed to slay him there, and at one blow rid the land of a tyrant and give it a just and good king."

When Sigurd heard this he turned white and red with wrath and fear. Fiercely he summoned his guards, and bade them seize the spy and cast him into the dungeon.

Then, as soon as words came, he turned to the company and said,

"You hear what this knave says?"

"Yes, we hear," cried some, "and we rejoice that Sigurd's day has come at last. Long live King Sigurd!"

Then Sigurd struck the table with his fist as he started to his feet and glared at the rash companions.

"Villains!" he shouted, with a voice that made the room itself tremble. "Yes, Sigurd's day has come—the day for teaching cowards like you the duty of a knight and a brother. Ulf, at his bridal, unarmed, slain by traitors' hands. Is that the chivalry ye praise? If so, begone from my sight and the reach of this arm! But 'tis no time for talk. Without there! my arms! and saddle my horse!"

"What means this?" cried all. "Where go you, Sigurd?"

"I go to my brother," he said.

"Your brother! Ulf is eight days' sail from here!"

"'Tis but five days across the forest," said the hero.

At this the ladies shrieked, and all looked on Sigurd as on a man that was mad.

"The forest, said you?" cried one. "It swarms with wolves, Sigurd, and where the wolves are not, the robbers lurk!"

Sigurd smiled scornfully.

"It is wolves and robbers I go to seek," he said.

"If thou wilt go," they said then, "we will go with thee."

"No!" cried Sigurd. "I go alone. Let him who