

The Hunt of Sir Reginald de l'Oiseau

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Sir Reginald de l'Oiseau was sitting in his great chair in the hall of Chateau de l'Oiseau, wife gently snoring at his side. It was his turn to host the monthly banquet that the knights of County Jambon (this obscure corner of Couronne was known as 'Party County' to the remainder of Bretonnia).

He looked down the dimly lit hall to where the guests sat. There were four knights present tonight, their ladies accompanying. Sir Reginald's squire had been down the valley to the Chateau de Boeuf, and had explained the reason for the absence of the guest of honor. Apparently, Count Baldwin had recently been struck by an elf arrow. The cowardly weapon had dealt him an injury to his right leg, and he had been unable to mount his steed for some time. But the gossip said that the count's condition was improving, and he would be able to attend the banquet hosted by Sir de Brouillon, Sir Reginald's rival.

The thought made the knight sigh, and he lifted a goblet. The wine was a good Bordeleaux, supposedly a 1502, but the merchant — so Reginald's steward said — had also claimed to have a 799. The steward had also said it tasted like a cheap Tilean, not dissimilar to some of the wines in Reginald's cellar. Reginald did not quite understand how his steward might know the taste of the chateau's wine, and thought that it might be a good idea to threaten a month in the stocks to find out.

At least the guests who did come were having a good time. The conversation had turned to hunting, and Sir Reginald leaned closer to listen in.

Sir Harold de Colline was talking about hunting with de Brouillon, sitting across from him at the end of the table. 'So then the boar charges me, and all the peasants I sent to beat it out ran off!'

'Stinking peasants. Good for nothing, are they not?' said de Brouillon, to a murmur of approval from his wife.

'Precisely,' said de Colline. 'So as I was saying, they all run off, and . . .'

'But boar hunting,' de Brouillon broke in. 'Down in Artois the new fashion is pheasant hunts.'

Sir Reginald blinked hard. He had done a fair bit of hunting, but this was surprising. 'I'm sorry, de Brouillon, I think I misheard you. You know my hearing hasn't been what it was since that Imperial mortar shell exploded over my head.'

'Over your head?' gasped Dame de Colline. Sir Harold was younger than most of his peers, only having completed his Errand of Knighthood a few years previously. His wife was barely twenty, and still more flighty than the more mature middle-aged women at the table — who echoed her shock. 'Over your head?' she repeated. 'But how did you survive?'

"By the grace of the Lady, most of the fragments missed me. Though my new shield was completely ruined, of course. My squire couldn't even find all the pieces."

At this, the knights nodded sympathetically, most having also fought on that field and heard the story several times on the evening of the incident alone. But the young Dame de Colline was still unsatisfied. "But the men nearby? Surely they must have been badly injured."

"Every one of them was killed," Reginald said sadly.

Dame de Colline gasped again, as her husband solemnly replied: "A pity, so many brave men slain."

"Brave men?" Reginald laughed. "Oh no, it was little loss. I was accompanying my men-at-arms on that day, and I have plenty more of those." The laughter of the other guests muted Sir Harold's quiet "oh."

But the young knight composed himself quickly, and turned back to de Brouillon. "So, pheasants, you were saying? I tried hunting them once."

"Little buggers can be rather difficult to catch, can they not?" De Brouillon had yet to stop laughing, and saw this as an excuse to continue.

Reginald broke in. "Even so, it seems a little unfair."

"Well, one can hardly expect even a boar to defeat a knight, and pheasants are a bit less dangerous." Reginald usually had little time for Brouillon's mockery of this sort, but this time he nodded sagely and leaned back, staring into the smoky heights of the ceiling. Brouillon continued.

"But it is annoying how they always try to fly away."

Reginald again blinked hard, wiggling a finger in his ear. Fly? he thought. "Cursed mortar shell," he said out loud, turning to Brouillon for a clarification. But the knight ignored him, as he usually did, and Reginald soon thought no more of it.

"Well, I suppose I could try it," he eventually said, loudly enough to draw even de Brouillon's attention. Maybe this would be a better use of his steward than the stocks.

"Excellent!" said Harold. "You do have a suitable wood in your estate?"

"Of course. I'm sure you'd like to come?"

“Absolutely.

The last time I had a good hunt was when I was still on my Errand, tracking Beastmen in the Arden.” With this, the conversation turned to the Beastmen, and after a while to goblins the knights had killed, and then somewhat inexplicably to cheese. But Reginald had already lost concentration, and was already planning the hunt. He would release them in the center of the wood, and ride them down with lances — no, just boar spears to keep it fair. Outside the trees he would station his men-at-arms, in case the hunted tried to flee . . .

It was not long until he too joined his wife in slumber, shortly after deciding not to roast and eat the spoils of the hunt.

Within the year, the peasant hunts of Reginald de l’Oiseau would become legend.