



Boy with a Black Rooster

Stefanie vor Schulte

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A fairy tale with an edge, Stefanie vor Schulte's *Boy with a Black Rooster* explores a vast land afflicted by cruelty and ill fortune.

Martin is a kindhearted orphan whose father went insane and killed the rest of his family. Looked upon as a bringer of bad luck by the locals, Martin, with his steadfast companion, a rooster he can communicate with, seeks his fortune outside their village, joining up with a traveling painter. What follows is a succession of dreamlike and nightmarish episodes in which Martin, his rooster, and the painter roam from village to village, seeking a local girl who was abducted by mysterious horsemen. Their quest takes them through skull-filled ravines, forests populated by werewolves, a town in which the dead are posed for family portraits, and to a kingdom ruled by a deranged princess who sacrifices children.

Boy with a Black Rooster's fabulistic incidents are relayed in a gritty tone that also accommodates humorous touches, including a local jester and hangman who is ordered to execute himself. Martin's quest is the focus, but the story's true tension comes from the duel between his innocence and the evil in the land that threatens to stain his soul. For every dark act, as with the princess barricading her kingdom and starving its inhabitants, there's a counterbalancing act of compassion, as when Martin helps one of the princess's subjects give birth during hard times.

Culminating in a tense showdown that takes place during a grueling "sleep game," the narrative circles back to Martin's home to answer lingering questions about his origins. *Boy with a Black Rooster* ventures to some terrifying places, but in true fairy-tale fashion, it also reassures and inspires thanks to its hero's humility and valor.

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