



Brothers

by Tell Payne

Kai unbound the cloak around his shoulders and let it slide free as he held his sword before him. The breeze was stronger now, and before the cloak slid to mid-back, it was picked up and blown a few feet away to land in a puddle. Gunnar now had made his way out of the hall, despite a protesting Greta.

“Father, stop! Kai saved me from being ravaged by that ingrate Ryan. He deserves honor, not death!”

Gunnar pushed her away from him with such force that she fell to the ground. “You don’t understand what is happening here, girl. Get inside.”

Greta was rising from the ground to protest again when Kai said, “Listen to your father, Greta. We have business which requires closure. Whatever honor you feel I deserve, consider it fulfilled in the fact that you are safe. That is all the honor I need.”

“But...”

“Go, girl!” Gunnar barked.

Greta walked into the hall and closed the door behind her.

“You’ve got balls, Kai. I never expected to see you again. Thought you had disappeared into the wild like the beast you are.”

“I wish I had now. Gunnar, we don’t have to fight. No bloodshed will bring ease to you.”

Gunnar laughed. “Oh, it will. If the blood is yours, I’ll feel better. Our parents will feel better. Hilda will feel better! Once you are dead, their souls may rest in peace.”

“I didn’t kill your Hilda or our parents. We are brothers! Why after all these years do you still not believe me?”

“Liar!” Gunnar leaped forward swinging his axe. Kai parried with his sword in both hands and kicked Gunnar in the stomach. Gunnar stumbled backwards and fell to the ground.

Gunnar grunted and stood up. “I saw you slay father. I saw you run him through with your sword. I saw father fall to his knees and look up at you and plead before you tore your sword from his stomach and walked away. I will *never* forgive you!”

“That wasn’t father. A demon had hold of him. It was the demon who killed mother and Hilda. He was going to slay Knut before I stopped him. I’m sorry I couldn’t stop him sooner, before Hilda.”

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“Lies! Come, be a man and fight me!” Gunnar stood with his axe in a ready position.

“Gunnar...”

“Fight me!”

Kai readied his sword then charged Gunnar. Sparks flew into the air as axe and sword met. Gunnar grunted and pushed Kai back far enough to chop at his torso. Kai stepped back and countered with his own chop at Gunnar’s shoulder. Gunnar moved quickly and ducked under the sword, kicking at Kai’s legs.

Kai fell to the ground and rolled, dodging Gunnar’s attack and coming up on his feet just behind his brother. He thrust his sword, but was parried and countered by an elbow to the stomach. Gunnar swung his axe again at Kai’s torso, missing as Kai spun away.

Again sword and axe met in a shower of light, revealing a small gathering growing around the two snarling brothers. Greta was among the crowd, trembling.

Both brothers fought with fluid skill, neither giving the other any gain. Kai was bleeding from a gash across his back. Gunnar was also bleeding. This was a fight between two equally matched men, both masters of their weapons. It could only end with one outcome: death.

His breath coming in gasps, Gunnar rose from the ground after his feet were tangled in Kai’s discarded cloak. He raised his axe high and charged. Kai parried the blow aside and dropped his sword. He threw himself at Gunnar, knocking him to the ground. Kai tore Gunnar’s axe from his hands and threw it away.

Gunnar stood up, pulling his seax out. He circled his brother until Kai was standing, grasping his knife as well. They lunged at each other, both drawing blood then retreating. The fight was slowing. Both brothers’ chests were heaving, their limbs were quivering with the heat of battle, and blood was flowing.

“Let’s stop this madness, Gunnar.”

“No! You started this sixteen winters ago. It will end tonight.”

Kai jumped back as Gunnar slashed. He countered with a jab, only managing to tear Gunnar’s shirt. Gunnar feinted with his seax, and as Kai dodged, Gunnar kicked him. Kai staggered back a step but had no time to steady himself before Gunnar was on top of him again. Gunnar grappled Kai’s knife hand and stabbed at him with his seax, tearing open an ugly gash in Kai’s right side, the blade sliding across ribs. Kai caught Gunnar’s knife hand, crashed his forehead on the bridge of Gunnar’s nose, then broke free.



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Blood was soaking Kai's side, and it seemed the cut was filled with fire. He knew this had to end soon, but was loathe to finish it.

Gunnar rushed in, slamming a fist into Kai's wound. Kai stumbled back. When Gunnar rushed again, Kai sidestepped the lunge and slid his seax between Gunnar's ribs.

Gunnar stumbled forward a few steps until he fell. Blood was pumping out. Steam rose from the blood as the last bit of life flowed from Gunnar.

Kai fell to his knees, trembling. He looked up to the sky and howled.



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