

The Brother and Sister Samurai

There was once a great samurai lord who led a mighty clan of samurai, his lands were vast and wealthy and to defend them he had a number of castles and forts as well as a large and well-trained army of soldiers and samurai warriors. He had two children, twins, a son and a daughter named Haruki and Haruka. Both were trained in the ways of war and the ways of the sword.

As his children came of age, they took on more and more responsibilities in the clan, helping with administering the lands and accompanying the army on campaigns. The lord often accompanied one or even both his children in the field, and his officers trusted and respected them.

Then one winter, the lord fell dangerously ill. He was confined to his bed for many days and despite having the best of doctors there were times when his son and daughter feared for his life. When the spring came the illness left him, but it had left him thin and weak. His doctors said that it was best if he no longer accompanied his army in the field. Reluctantly, the lord conceded to the plans of his doctors and children.

The following summer, the lord's enemies took advantage of his seeming weakness by uniting against him and invading his lands, taking villages, burning fields and killing people. In response, messengers were dispatched were sent to the lord's vassals and bannermen, urging them to muster their armies to defend the clan. Both Haruki and Haruka took the field to lead the armies of the clan in this.

At first their efforts were successful, the clan's enemies were repelled and driven from the lands. But as summer turned to autumn, the lord's enemies rallied and drove the forces of the clan back.

The lord's vassals then gathered at his largest castle to discuss strategy. They assembled in the large reception room around a big map of the clan's lands. The lord was sitting at one end of the room with his son Haruki on his left and his daughter Haruka on his right.

The lord began to speak. "The clan stands at a decisive point, if we act now we can drive the enemy from our lands for once and for all. But there can be no victory without sacrifice."

These words were met with an air of seriousness by those in the room. So Haruki spoke up.

"Father, I will take the best of our forces and engage the enemy in the field. We will not rest until the enemies of the clan are beyond our borders." He knelt before his father and bowed low. "Every blade is ready to defend the clan, every life is ready to be given for the sake of victory."

There was a murmuring of agreement among the others. Then Haruki began to speak.

"And father, I will make sure that every fort, every castle, every village in the path of the enemy will rally to defend the clan. Every voice and hand will be raised in defiance of our enemies." She then knelt beside her brother and bowed as well. "I will see myself that this is done, come what may."

The lord looked at his son and daughter, he had taught them all he knew and they were the very image of what he hoped they would be. This filled his heart with joy as well as sadness.

He put his hands on the shoulders of his son and daughter. "So it shall be," he said.

And so the army was dispatched against the enemies of the clan. Haruki rode out with them, astride a white horse and clad in distinctive armour in red, black and gold. The same armour that his father had worn as a young man. And indeed, some of older veterans looked at Haruki in his father's armour and remembered their younger days when his father had worn it.

Haruka rode all over the lands of the clan in the path of the enemy, rallying the people who were still there. The merchants, the farmers, the fisherman and artisans, inspiring them and making sure they were ready if the enemy would arrive.

But what also happened when she came to the villages was that women came out to meet her. Married, unmarried, young mothers, mothers with grown children. They wanted to fight as she did, to learn the ways of weapon and war. Haruka saw that these women had training and weapons to defend their homes and families.

On the battlefield, Haruki secured an early victory against the enemy, but it was at a significant cost to their own army. Haruki was most aggrieved at this, he knew that they gave their lives to defeat the enemies of the clan but he still felt responsible for their deaths.

Haruki ordered the army to camp for the night. He knew that reinforcements were due to arrive in the morning and they would not engage the enemy until then.

That evening the army ate, drank and made merry, confident in that they would be victorious the next day. Haruki dined with his generals, discussing strategy for the next day before all retired to bed. Once alone in his tent, Haruki called out for his servant to bring tea.

The servant brought it in on a tray, Haruki told him to put it on the table. When Haruki's back was turned, the servant drew a dagger concealed in his sleeve. At that moment Haruki's friend and second in command came to the tent door and gave a shout that caused Haruki to turn.

And so, the dagger that had been pointed at Haruki's back and would have killed him, was now pointed at his side and wounding him. Haruki quickly grabbed the servant's wrist and wrenched the dagger from him, cutting the servant's throat all before his friend had time to cross the room.

Haruki collapsed in his friend's arms, bleeding profusely. "Don't tell the men."

When Haruki's wound was bound and he was lying in bed, a doctor was sent for but the news was not good. The blade had been poisoned, Haruki would be dead by morning. The doctor was bade to tell this to no one and Haruki called his friend to his side.

"Send for my sister," he said.

"But she may not get here in time," said his friend.

"Send for Haruka," Haruki said. "For there is no one else who can lead the army."

And so, it was that in the early hours of the morning, a messenger rode up to the gates of the castle. Both the lord and Haruka were roused from their beds to see the messenger. The messenger was then told to leave and the two was alone.

The lord was silent for a long moment. Then he finally spoke to his daughter. "I had wished for a way to know whether you or your brother should succeed me...I wish I had not."

Haruka clasped her father's hands gently. "Father, Haruki is better than me, how can I live up to his example?"

"You misunderstand, my daughter," said her father. "This is not about which of you is better, but who is more able."

Haruka nodded.

"You must go now, my daughter," her father said. "No one must know of this if our armies are to be victorious."

Haruka left the castle on a fast horse, disguised as a messenger. She road through the night, desperate that she would be in time, that her brother would not die before she got there.

Grey light was appearing in the horizon as Haruka entered the camp. And greyer still was her brother's face when Haruka came into his tent.

"You made it," said Haruki, giving a weak smile. "I knew you were the better out of us..."

"I am not," interjected Haruka.

"But you are," said Haruki. "You must now secure not just victory for the clan, but lead them after father is gone."

"I should be where you are, and you lead our clan to glory," Haruka pleaded.

"But that is not how it happened," said Haruki. "I know you will succeed, my sister, just do not tell the men what has happened."

"I promise," said Haruka, "you will have your victory, my brother."

Haruki died and Haruko bowed her head. She wanted to cry, to scream, but she could not, it was her brother's final wish that his death would not be known to the army. The sun was rising outside, sounds came from the tents as the camp woke for the day and prepared for battle.

She looked at her brother's body lying on the bed and then to his armour on its stand shining in red and gold.

She knew what she had to do.

Clad in the red, gold and black armour that had been worn by her brother and father, Haruka rode out on a white horse at the head of the army. The soldiers and samurai cheered loud and the banners flew high as they advanced to engaged the enemy.

And when the enemy army saw Haruka, mistaking her for her brother, they quaked in fear. For it was their leaders who had sent the assassin, and then told them that Haruki was dead and his army would be lost without him. The figure in the armour told a different story, and so the enemy army turned and routed.

Haruka ordered the army to give chase, to take as many as they could as the enemy fled their lands. Haruka watched them, satisfied. She had done as she had promised, she had led the clan to victory.

The camp celebrated that night, and Haruka knew it was good to let them. So, she waited until the next day to announce the news of her brother's death. Everyone in the camp stood in silent mourning as Haruki's body was taken through the camp, accompanied by Haruka. At the castle, she stood by her father's side at her brother's funeral.

A year later, Haruka was confirmed as her father's heir to lead the clan and when he stepped aside to retire to a monastery, she led the clan into an era of prosperity and glory.