

Storm of Battle

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He wrapped his fingers around the hilt, and drew forth the sword...

My name is Scarthenscurim. In the tongue of my people, it means "Storm of Battle." Some say that I was rightly named. But I...well, perhaps you can judge for yourself.

My father's name was Weland. I had numerous brothers and sisters, and it is no exaggeration when I say that they were too numerous to count. My father was fond of producing offspring, and, although he loved each of his children dearly, I was his favorite, even moreso than Gran. My father often said that he loved me the most because I was the culmination of all his skill, the final and perfect child that he had created. For not long after I came into this world, he died. But he had lived a very long life and had been held in the highest honor by our tribe. He was honored so greatly, in fact, that upon his death, I went to live with Hildebrand, the chieftain of our tribe.

After they had laid my father upon the pyre, set fire to his body, and sent his spirit to Valhalla, Hildebrand came alone to our home that lay on a mountain. My father had been a very secluded man, devoting himself to his unsurpassed skill in making weapons. Hildebrand found me hiding in the corner of our home, alone and cold. He placed his warm and reassuring hand on me.

"Do not fear," he said in a comforting voice. "I will take you with me. For I will not abandon the favorite child of Weland. For many seasons, your father served me, fashioning weapons for my warriors. A skill such as his will never be seen again in Midgard, and his name will be sung by many generations to come. I will raise you in my home, and, when you are ready, you will go side by side with me into battle. For looking at you, I can tell that you were made for battle – to slaughter your enemies and soak the field of battle red with their blood."

At the mention of battle, a desire rose up in me that I knew could only be satisfied by slaying my enemies. Hildebrand was right. I had been made for battle. Although I knew it could be years before I was ready to prove myself in battle. But the thought of being honored by Hildebrand to enter into battle at his side filled me with a love for the man even though I had just met him.

Hildebrand picked me up, looked around the empty house, and carried me down the mountain to his own home.

Hildebrand had a young son named Hadubrand, who was only about two seasons old when I was taken into his home. The boy had the look of his mother, but in every other regard, he was like his father. From the moment I was brought into the home of Hildebrand, Hadubrand tried to adopt me. He was always wanting to play with me in mock combats and battles because, as I have said, he was very much like his father and

possessed his father's courage and strength even at that young age. But Hildebrand would always forbid his son from playing with me in that manner because he was afraid that his young son would be hurt. Hildebrand loved his son dearly and was always protective of him. And at the same time, Hildebrand tried to instill in his son the same qualities that he held dear such as honor, respect, and bravery. These qualities of Hildebrand both as a father and as a man must be kept in mind as I tell my story.

The day finally came when Hildebrand took me into battle with him for the first time. He actually felt confident enough in my skill to take me with him after only having been in his home for one season.

Hildebrand was close friends with Theodoric, the king of the Ostrogoths, and Hildebrand often served as his champion in battle. Theodoric was continually fighting with Odoacer, who had been able to establish himself as king of Italy. Odoacer had brought an army to attack Theodoric, and Hildebrand was taking a band of warriors to aid his closest friend.

I will never forget that first battle that I fought in.

We stood staring at our enemy across the wide plain. Already, the crows were flying, dark and hungry for corpses. As the anticipation for battle grew around me, I began to yearn to race across the plain and slaughter our enemies. But a feeling of doubt also began to rise inside of me, afraid of whether or not I would prove myself worthy enough to go into battle by Hildebrand's side.

As if sensing my doubt, Hildebrand laid his hand upon me and spoke comforting words.

"Today," he said softly, "you will prove yourself to me in this battle. There is no doubt in my mind that by the end of this day you will have soaked the field with the blood of our enemies."

Upon hearing Hildebrand's words, I immediately wanted to jump forth and slay the first enemy I came into contact with. But Hildebrand kept his hand firmly placed upon me, holding me back until when he knew the time was right.

Suddenly, the enemy broke their battle line and began to run towards us. We immediately raced towards them, our warriors shouting their battle-cries up to the sky. As we got closer to the enemy, the noise became overwhelming from the sound of warriors running, banging their weapons, and screaming. When our two forces met in the middle of the plain, the sound of our collision was so loud that I thought it must have echoed in the halls of Valhalla itself.

Immediately, a battle-fury seized hold of me and the only thought in my mind was to kill. Hildebrand had often said that I had been brought into this world for the purpose of slaughter, and I did not let him down. As soon as my first enemy was in front of me, everything went black and there was only death.

I cut into the stomach of one warrior...sliced into the shield arm of another. I decapitated one warrior...took the legs out from under another. I took the life of every warrior that I came into contact with. I even saved Hildebrand from certain death by blocking an enemy's sword or axe a couple of times.

I don't know how long the battle lasted. But by the end of it, I was covered in the blood of our enemies. It was Hildebrand's touch that brought me out of my battle-fury once the battle was over. Before I realized it, he had both of his hands placed on me.

"Son of Weland," he said in a tired and gasping voice. "You have far exceeded my expectations about you when I brought you into my home only a short season ago. From this day forth, you will always be by my side in battle."

That night, at the feast in celebration of our victory, I had the honor of being placed beside the right hand side of Hildebrand. His hand was continuously on me, patting me with pride, as he recounted our deeds in battle.

It was not long after that battle that Hildebrand was forced to leave his tribe. For it came to pass that Theodoric's throne was seized by his uncle, Eormanric. Eormanric was a cruel man who, upon seizing the kingship of the Ostrogoths, plotted to kill Theodoric and all those that threatened his newly acquired kingship. Theodoric fled to my lord Hildebrand, seeking the aid of his closest friend. Hildebrand was torn between his friendship and loyalty for Theodoric and his love for his family. In the end, though, honor guided Hildebrand's life just as it always had and he chose to aid his friend. It was decided by the two men that they would go into exile for now until they were able to gain enough support to make Theodoric king again.

The parting of Hildebrand and Hadubrand was one of great sorrow. The child, only four seasons old, was too young to understand why his father was leaving. As Hildebrand held his son close to him, fighting back the tears, I wanted to cry out to Hildebrand to leave me to protect his son. But before I knew it, Hildebrand walked over to the corner where I was concealed and laid his hand on me. He paused a moment, turning back to his son as if trying to make up his mind, before speaking to me.

"You will come with me," he said in a determined voice. "I place all of this in the hands of the Fates and hope I am making the right decision to take you with me rather than leave you here to guard my son. Hopefully, this exile will not last long."

For thirty seasons, we lived in exile.

Hildebrand and Theodoric fought in many battles trying to earn the support of other kings and tribes so that Theodoric could be restored to his kingship and so that Hildebrand could return home. And in each battle, I was at my lord's side. With each passing season, Hildebrand yearned to return home to his family, but especially to his son. And with each passing season, not only the signs of age and battle showed on my lord's face, but the sadness he carried with him as well.

But after thirty seasons of exile, we were finally returning home, having gathered enough support to face the army of Eormanric in battle and restore Theodoric to his throne.

It had been decided that the champion of each army would fight to decide the outcome of the battle. This had been a common practice of our ancestors, but was rarely observed now. A warrior from the army of Eormanric had issued the challenge, and we could not back down. It was whispered among our warriors that the young warrior was trying to seek the favor of Eormanric, who had subjugated the tribe of the young champion. It was also whispered among our warriors how rash the young warrior was to make this challenge without knowing who he was going to meet in single combat.

As always, I was at Hildebrand's side as he strode across the plain to meet the young and brash warrior in the middle of the field between the two armies.

We were getting closer to the warrior, and, suddenly, part of me wanted to scream out to Hildebrand to leave the field of battle and walk away from this warrior. I didn't know why this urge was building inside of me because I had no doubts concerning Hildebrand's abilities as a warrior. Something about this battle just seemed wrong, and it seemed that it would be a dark day no matter what the outcome would be.

As if sensing my feeling of impending doom, Hildebrand laid his hand upon me in reassurance, his strength rejuvenating my own moment of weakness.

Hildebrand and the other warrior stopped about thirty paces away from one another and began to size each other up. The young warrior was about the same height and build as Hildebrand, and appeared to be just a little over thirty seasons old. He had had much experience in battle because his body proudly displayed the many scars he had received in close combat. The warrior's piercing blue eyes kept looking Hildebrand up and down, and I could tell that the warrior now had doubts about issuing his challenge despite Hildebrand's age.

Finally, Hildebrand broke the silence between the two.

"Tell me your name, brave young warrior," Hildebrand said in a jovial tone. "I have traveled far and wide over Midgard, and it is just possible that I know either your father or some other of your kin."

"My name is Hadubrand, the son of Hildebrand," the warrior answered.

Hildebrand stared in disbelief and silence at his son, whom he had not seen in thirty seasons. Slowly, he began to recognize the features of his son that he had known when he was a small child. He still had the look of his mother, but Hildebrand could also see that his son carried himself on the battlefield just as he carried himself: emulating strength, showing no fear, and overflowing with honor.

"It has been thirty seasons," Hadubrand continued, "since my father left behind his wife and small son when he fled with Theodoric from the wrath of Eormanric. I have heard how he always fought in the forefront of every battle and became the most trusted and loved warrior of Theodoric."

Hildebrand was silent for a few moments, not knowing what to say.

I watched on in silence, in shock just as much as Hildebrand was that Hadubrand, his own son, was standing before him as the champion of the enemy and challenging him to fight. Finally, Hildebrand replied.

"Hadubrand, son of Hildebrand," he said with emotion in his voice. "May you never go into battle against your next of kin." Hildebrand then took off a beautifully wrought arm ring made of gold and held it out to Hadubrand. "I give this to you, Hadubrand, in well-met friendship. For I am Hildebrand, your father, returned home after thirty long seasons of exile."

Hadubrand stared at Hildebrand with distrust in his eyes, which soon turned into anger. Suddenly, he started to laugh.

"You are very cunning, old man," Hadubrand said with contempt in his voice. "While accepting your gift, you mean to slay me with your spear from behind. But I know something that your deceitful mind does not know. For I have received news from the mouths of sea merchants that my father fell in battle long ago. Keep your riches and prepare to meet your death."

Time seemed to stand still as Hildebrand stared at his son with his arm outstretched holding the arm ring. Both he and I knew that there was no way to prove to

Hadubrand that Hildebrand was indeed his father. Slowly, Hildebrand lowered his arm and dropped the arm ring to the ground. He stared into the eyes of his son and spoke slowly with emotion in his voice.

"Wyrd has brought you and I onto this battlefield. Our fates were written from that moment thirty seasons ago when I chose honor and friendship, leaving you behind. But our lives are governed by the choices we make and to regret our choices is futile, regardless of their outcome. Know this, Hadubrand son of Hildebrand: I am your father and I love you, though this day will see the death of one of us."

These words angered Hadubrand all the more, and he hurled his spear at Hildebrand. Hildebrand lifted up his shield to block the spear. As the spear tore through his shield, he threw it to the ground and threw his own spear at Hadubrand. Hadubrand blocked the spear with his own shield, threw his shield to the ground, drew forth his sword, and charged against Hildebrand with his sword raised in the air.

I tried to scream out to Hildebrand to stop, but it was too late.

Hadubrand was cut from the left upper part of his chest down to the bottom right part of his stomach. His blood sprayed everywhere, soaking me and revolting me. Hadubrand fell to the ground and immediately his hands flew up to his wound in a vain effort to stop the bleeding. But you could see by the look in his eyes that even Hadubrand knew his life was near an end.

As I dropped to the ground, Hildebrand ran to his son and dropped on his knees in front of him. He gently picked the head of his son up and placed it in his lap. He tried to speak, but there were no words he could say that would even begin to express what he was feeling. His tears began to drop down in a flood onto the face of his son.

Hadubrand, finally realizing that Hildebrand was indeed his father, took his father's hand in his own and laid it upon his chest. He tried to form the word 'father' on his lips, but his breath was already fading fast, becoming shallower and shallower. Finally, he took his last breath and his eyes closed for the last time.

Hildebrand stared up at the sky, helplessly looking for some answer to this ill-fated day that brought him against his son in battle.

"Wyrd," was all he could say to the empty sky.

Hildebrand gently laid his son's head on the ground, stood up, and started to walk away. He stopped and turned around to look at me. Slowly he walked back towards me.

"Ill-gotten was the day I took you into my home," he said as he stood over me. "And though I do not blame you for this day, nevertheless I must leave you here. For never again could you go into battle at my side again after we have taken the life of my son."

He turned and walked away.

As I lay on the ground, covered in the blood of the son of my adopted father, I did not call out to him to come back or to not abandon me.

I, the sword that had killed the son of my lord, laid there and waited for my own fate.

...he sheathed the sword, and removed his fingers from the hilt.