Sootputra: The Unsung Hero

Chapter 15 Memories.

“So you knew Ashwathama?”

“Yess!” I answered.

I had just finished relaying my entire story to them. I even told them about the curse of the Brahmin, Although I skipped the part where I was cursed by My Acharya Parshuram. Thinking that would reduce my image in front of him if he heard about that particular curse. I avoided it. I didn’t wanted to lose my only friend in the world. His obligations were already enough for my entire life. Telling him about that will only lead to me being again thrown to the sides with no one to hold onto. The image was scary enough to hold my words and actions back.

“We …..were

Friends.

I don’t know how it would feel to meet him after all this time.

But it’ll be good to at least see him.

Is he still pursuing Archery?”

“Yeah……..” Duryodhan answered with a little doubt in his voice.

“He still is a good archer but…….

Arjuna has beaten him ages ago.

So he shifted his gaze towards battlefield.

He is an Outstanding strategist now.

And a good friend of Dushashan.”

“Ashwathama!!!, A Strategist??” I chuckled.

The boy only had a little brain when he was with me. Hearing about him as a good strategist made me think about all the dead soldiers that will be fighting or revolting against him.

Still, It was good to hear that he still practices and polishes his skills of Archery.

“Did he ever…..

Talked about me?”

“Hmm….I….I didn’t hear anything from Dushashan or Ashwathama.

Sorry Friend, but today was the first day I have ever heard the name Karna.” Duryodhan said with a sympathizing voice.

“It’s alright.” I replied to him.

It was understandable . He must be furious, I left without saying a word. He still must be mad. I better handle it with care the next time I meet him or this could get ugly really fast.

“We always thought that one day It would be Ashwathama who would surpass or at least even out Arjuna in wielding a bow. Before you it was him who was the closest to Arjuna in Archery.

Whenever asked during a practice session he often told us that ‘He has someone he needs to beat.’ .

Shame he doesn’t know that his goal has just been set even higher now.

That guy is persistent I sympathize with him.” Duryodhan ended his statement with a drink down his throat. There were only bones of the chicken left on the platter. Almost all the food and fruits were finished.

“Clap, Clap.”

Another Dassi or Vaisha?

It was hard to tell from the way they all dressed when entering the room. She came and picked the empty and bone filled plates and hurried back outside.

“Send another plate in as quickly as possible.” Duryodhan said to her in a high tone.

“Yess, Prince.” She said lowering here head slightly while taking her leave.

“I envy you Karna.” Shakuni finally said his words. He was completely drunk enough to fall the next step he took.

“Me too.” Duryodhan supported him.

I couldn’t point my finger to what they were talking about. Both of them were drunk. Infact the whole room reeked of old alchohol. The one that called me my friend, Duryodhan. The one who respected me till now was suddenly siding with Shakuni and jealous of me. Was his true self emerging out due to the many drinks he had consumed in the past hour? Was he finally regretting his decision?

“I wish, had your body. Your tej, Your looks.”

“What are you saying? You are completely drunk” I said to him.

“You still haven’t noticed!!!!!

For someone as bright as you. For someone as strong as you.

You are still a blockhead.

Don’t you see?”

“What?” I enquired.

“The way they look at you.

All this time you were here.

Most of the daasie’s and vaisha’s were looking at you with those eyes.

Those …….. lustful ……….. eyes.

They never look at us the way they look at you.

Your face, your kundal, your aura around your buffed up body.

It all invites them.” Duryodhan took another drink.

“Hah… what I wouldn’t give to have that, what I wouldn’t give to have that kundal, that Armor.”

The door suddenly opened again. The daasi that previously took the empty plates was now standing at the doorway with another. Both of them each were holding a plate of food and fruits.

They slowly entered the room as to not knock all the food on the floor. Someone had just patted me slitghly to the front. It was Shakuni. He was pointing towards the girls with a heinous smile. His signal was understandable and his lust was apparently very clear.

But he was not wrong. I could see from the corner of my eyes that Both of the girls were looking at me but as soon as I met theirs they shifted their gaze on Duryodhan. They took their plates and placed them on the table( A little closer to me than to my friend). Duryodhan smirked. He already knew well what was going on, On the other hand I had just realized now after both of them pointing it out.

Both the girls were standing near the table after placing the food on it. They were waiting for further directions from either of the men in the room.

Shakuni suddenly went in and pulled the taller one by the hand and pushed her on the couch where I was sitting.

“Haah….Ouch” She suddenly fell on top of me. Her face was very close to mine. In my whole life I had never been this close to a woman. But this one was looking me in the eyes and didn’t moved an inch. As if waiting for me to tell her something. Her heavy warm breath was tingling my lips. Her saffron smell was very addictive and the way her coal hair were covering her half face. Her brown eyes were….. heavy……

No, no, no, no. This isn’t right. I knew what they were trying to do. But I wasn’t ready for it. For me she was just some lady not a tool to be used and thrown. My heart throbbed with every passing thought.

“Are you okk?” words barely escaped my mouth.

I held her by her arms and pushed her slightly back.

“You didn’t get hurt right?

I’m sorry for that. ”

“No…it’s…it’s.. alright.” She said in a whisper.

I stood up and first time in the night went for the drinks table. There was too much in my mind that needed clearing. She also stood up and Duryodhan directed them both to go. I could still feel their stares at the back of my head. As if drilling into my skulls and pleading me to turn and look back. That day was the first time that I drank.

The bitter taste was squeezing my mouth. How could they drink a gallon of this I couldn’t make myself to drink another. It was even worse than the lemon. Duryodhan told me to mix some juice but I had already lost my appetite for another gulp.

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“You always will be a brave, innocent but a virgin if you keep that attitude alive.” Duryodhan said to me.

It has been a couple of moments since those two left and both Shakuni and Duryodhan were now sitting on the couch in front of me.

“Karna, time for an another question.

Who are you?” Shakuni asked

I was confused when he asked me that. I had already told him everything I knew about me. Then Why ask this.

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t get me wrong here? ” Shakuni said while standing up. He came next to me and sat on the same couch. I was a little intrigued by this behavior of his.

“Karna, This armor.” He pointed his pointy fingers to my chest and a portion of my golden armor sprung up between him and me.

“last time I checked not every Sootputra had this armor.”

I knew from the start that this question was coming. I had mentally prepared myself for it. But still the answer was difficult.

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“This kundal, this armor and me have always been together, They grow with me .They are the part of my body.

I don’t know how I got them. But I can’t get rid of them like a normal armor or kundal.

My parents don’t even know why I have it.

So from the very first day that I could remember, they have been a mystery to me.

One that I intend to solve someday.

Till then. They will always be with me. They protect me.”

“Didint your guru knew about them?” Duryodhan asked with a question face.

I took a little time to formulate my answer and also to reminisce all the beating I had taken from Acharya over the years. The brutal punches and gut wrenching kicks were still a nightmare from time to time. The soreness and pain one had to endure to be his disciple. Thinking about them was enough to give me Goosebumps all over my body. If only I had activated my Armor, Those fights would’ve resulted differently. But the chance of learning would also have been taken from me that sooner.

“I never activated it when I was training under him.

That would’ve failed the purpose of training.

If I had relied on them for every victory, I wouldn’t have reached the level that I have now.

So I never showed or used them with him.”

“How do they work?” Shakuni asked.

This was something I hadn’t told anyone except for Shon, not even my parents know.

The kundal distracts the person I don’t want to talk with. The same also attracts the attention of the ones I subconsciously want to notice me.

“And the armor?”

“Hmm…..normal astra and shastra are ineffective against them.

Even the power of the divine and celestial weapons gets weakened by a substantial amount when used against me.

You could say that this makes me invincible.”

“That’s good, That’s good.” Said Shakuni with a smile that showed his frontal black rotten teeth.

“And that’s why I don’t use it that much.”

Both of their faces were stumped for a moment. Their jaw was open upon hearing my sentence. They both were waiting for my explanation.

“As I told you before.

The armor protects me from harm. But it also makes me mostly invincible.

Therefore whenever I am fighting an opponent. I don’t use it unless they are using an extremely devastating attack.

As doing so will be unfair to my opponents.

The match will never be on the same level if I use it every time I go to battle.”

“Hmmm” Duryodhan was sent in a thoughtful state upon hearing my answer. I could guess what he was thinking. He was clearly disappointed to know that the friend he had chosen to fight for him don’t even uses his most powerful weapon in battle. I knew my principle forbade me from using them, but if Duryodhan wants I will fight using any means. If he will tell me to keep them activated at all times then I will do so, even if it means killing my own sense of justice.

“I respect that ” He said.

“Your sense of Honor and chivalry is quite rare these days.

Nothing less expected from the pupil of the greatest Guru of all.

I’m proud to have you as my friend.”

I didn’t know what to say. Once again he had demolished my expectation and went beyond it. He didn’t used or asked to change my methods but instead was proud of them. He really is as selfless. I was tilting more and more to believe his every word.

“Thank you friend.

Once again thank you.”

“No, need to, Karna.

You truly are something.

I must be a fortunate to lay my hands on a rare gem like you.

Now I also have an Archer like those vermins.

And when the time comes, I’ll rain literal hell upon them.”

He gave me the bow I had laid down on the nearby table. It was a reminder to me as an Archer.

“A king should be just. A king should be Kind.

A king should be caring.

Duryodhan, my friend you have shown each and every quality to be a king.

I don’t know about Yudhister but as a witness and a benefactor of the kindness shown by you.

I can definitely say that Hastinapur and all the kingdoms will be lucky to have a King like you at its helm.”

I expressed by gratitude towards him. In many ways we both were similar. He despite being a royal birth, despite of his generous nature, despite being a the eldest son of the king.

He was a victim like me. I saw myself in him. The kindness and righteousness he had was a rare quality that was hard to see these days.

He picked me up and hugged me like a true friend should.

I offered my liege and eternal friendship to him in return. The fortunes may have finally forgiven me. I didn’t know at that time what future had held for me in it’s grasp. But the thing that was clear was that everything will take an entirely different turn now. This moment is the start of something…….

Something that will start a new era for me.

For All.

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