Sootputra: The Unsung Hero

Chapter 18: The Grandfather….

We both were ready to leave on the journey as soon as possible. For me the feeling was mixed. I was overall excited for the journey and becoming a king but was also scared of the things that will come after that. In my life I always had people take care of me, and I have only ever cared for my needs and my family. To run and manage a kingdom was a daunting task, One for which I don’t know if I was ready. The uncertainty of future scared and jolted me at the same time.

The footsteps were getting louder. The Door to the room has just flunked open. It was Duryodhan at the other end.

“So ready my friend?”

He was wearing a blue golden scarf around his neck and his stubble was groomed this morning. His hair glistened at the slightest hints of shine on them. It felt like it was his crowning not mine.

“Here, I have brought you some of my clothes. ”

He threw a dozen or so of scarfs and various designed dhotis on the bed. The plethora of design which I haven’t even seen before. Choose one and get ready, he said.

“I can’t, friend.”

“Why?”

It was a little hard to explain to him the predicament I was feeling. I didn’t know if my words will reach his heart or if he will even be able to understand the situation from a low-born’s point of view.

“Friend, I was just a Sootputra till yesterday. My whole life I have been.

I don’t know if I am ready to be a king or not but if I have to be than I would be myself.

I don’t want to change so drastically that I forget where I came from.

I don’t want this palace, this money and power to overwhelm me.

A King I am then a low born king I will be.”

Duryodhan Pressed his head and sat on the chair. After a sigh breath he spoke.

“Karna, I know what you are saying and I get that but this world doesn’t.

They only recognize a warrior, a strong indvidual.

Therefore you have to be that warrior. That strong person.

You have to understand that now you are not a soot anymore.

And I know that you didn’t asked to be a King.

But you are now.

So it’s your responsibility to act like one, dress like one,

Be like one.”

His words struck a chord. He was right. If a king is not recognized by his people then he is not a king at all.

“Fine, you are right.

But I won’t wear any jewelries.”

“You don’t have to.” Duryodhan said.

“You already have that Armor and kundals.

You don’t need any.

Just keep them on and you’ll be good to go.”

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WE were both standing in the corridors waiting for the confirmation that the chariots have been prepped and ready to go. As requested I had worn the clothes offered by him.

The white scarf and gold layered dhoti was not something a mere boy like me gets to wear on a daily basis. Its silky softness was like a baby. Totally different from the clothes I was just wearing a moment ago. Guess this was going to get a fairly bit regular from now on. I had in my guts made a rule that no matter what I will try to be as normal and as simple as I am now, so as to not get carried away in the charms and illusions of this royal life. But I didn’t know if I would be able to sustain that rule. Only time could be my witness on that subject.

As we were talking about our journey I heard the sound of footsteps approaching us. Pitama Bhsima and RajMata Kunti had come in sight as we were getting ready to depart. They both were going on their way discussing something amongst them, but as her eyes found us in that corridor her path took a turn. Now it crossed with us. As she approached Duryodhan whispered to me to greet and take their blessing when they reach us and I did as told. My hands touched both of their feet's. The pitama took his steps back a little as I approached them, whereas Rajmata did no such thing. She stood there and even blessed me with her kind words caressing her hand on my forehead as I bent down to touch her toes.

“Who are you kid?” Pitama asked.

“Pitama, He is my friend.

Karna, We are---”

“I know that already.

I saw him too as you gave your inheritance to him.”

Pitama was gazing me up with his hazel eyes. He was very old. That was evident from his ashened hair and beard. But for an old man his build was strong almost musular. It reminded me of the day I first met Guru parshuram and the pressure he exerted on others. Pitama Bhisma’s aura was no less than him. So this was the grandfather of my friend and all other princes. He was almost of my height. The legendary warrior who was always an idol was standing right in front of me. His bare arms had some deep scars, certainly earned through his long history of battles. His rest of body was covered with a silvery robe so it was hard to tell his overall structure.

“Duryodhan, why don’t you go and check that the horses are ready or not.

I wanna talk to Karna alone for a moment.”

“But Pitama---”

“Duryodhan!!!”

Duryodhan eyes went down as he lowered his hands and clenched it in a fist. He wrapped his scarf around his hand and with heavy footsteps went to the gates. Kunti’s gaze was following Duryodhan’s path. Her eyes wanted to day something but couldn’t. Her attention was then stolen by the next words of Bhisma.

“I see parshurama hasn’t changed his training methods.”

“How can you be sure of that?” I said

“Your scars are the proof.”

He pointed out towards my arms and showed me his. Although my arms had some less in quantity but there were some similarities between the scars we each had.

“He is still as brutal as before.” Although from face and build no one can say that he was more than 60-70 years old but his trembling and stuttering voice was an evident fact that he was a very old man who has seen many generations in his life.

“You are not a soot, are you?

…. You can’t be. You neither have the aura or the face to be a soot. Those kundal and Armor can’t belong to one.

The question is--

Why are you lying about it?”

“Pitama ----” Rajamata interjected.

“Pitama I am a soot from birth.

And I am proud to be one.

If you think that I am otherwise then you should’ve said it in the arena. ” The silence took hold of the corridor. The few soldiers standing at guard averted their gaze.

“I just want to make sure that you are ready for the responsibilities.

You’ll be ruling one of our kingdoms.

Don’t ruin it.”

“Of course” I said.

“I think we are done here.

Let’s go kunti.”

“I’ll be right there Pitama.” Rajamta took bhisma’s place as he turned around to resume his pace.

“Kunti?”

‘A little odd for a Rajamta’ The expression on Pitama’s face said that. It was clear that he didn’t expected anything like this from her and he was not the only one. Bhisma took his leave and left the two of us alone on Kunti’s behest. Mata’s eyes were fixed like a snake on my face. Her smile, was it for me?

“How are you feeling Rajmata?

The other day you fainted in the arena.”

“I’m fine now.

But let’s talk about you.

Your face. It’s the fairest I have seen.

And those kundals.”

“These are my ears, Rajmata.

Although they look gold in color but they are my ears. I can’t remove them.”

“Same with your Armor?”

“Yess.” I was impressed by Rajamta’s deductive skills. I haven’t gave her any clues about my armor but still she was able to identify one of its property from my kundals.

Duryodhan had just appeared behind her. He told me that the horses and chariot’s have been prepped and that they are waiting for me. I took my leave, once again touching her feet.

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We were near the gate when I saw a skinny boy, waving his hands enthusiastically towards us. It was Shon. He was here. He was to be my new charioteer as per Mata and father’s request and his constant persistent.

“I told you Shon, you don’t have to do this.

I will talk to Father. You don’t have to feel any kind of pressure.”

“But I want to. You left once Bhai.

I wasn’t able to accompany you when you left.

And you returned after 10 years.

I don’t want it to happen again.

You’ll be surrounded by new men and women.

New circumstances, who knows when we’ll see each other again.

You need me.” A hug was the only reply I could give to hm. A tight loving hug, from a big scared heart. A heart that was a second ago uncertain to move forward but now had some support for it.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me bhai. If it wasn’t for prince duryodhan’s understanding. I would’ve never been able to do all this.”

I turned and offered my utmost thanks.

“Come on Karna. I knew how you were feeling.

In these situation, it’s good to have an emotional support.

Especially if that support is romantic.”

“Romantic?” I didn’t understand what he meant. Duryodhan pointed out to the chariot I was going to ride. As we both went to our chariots I saw Vrushali. She was placing some foods and bags in my chariot. I looked at Shon with a demanding look.

“Looks like we have a stowaway.” He said stuttering his words.

“Come on bhai. You will have many daasi’s now taking care of you. At least let me have one taking care of me.”

“Shon?” my voice pressed on him

“Bhai, you know how she is. When she makes that face and then suddenly starts crying. Dripping all of her tears down.

I mean how can one have so much tears. I can’t even sweat that much.

How can I say no to that?” he said quickly in one breath.

“What about Uncle?”

“He was the one who dropped her off.

Shit!!!” he said

“Yeah, you can say that”

“No look.” Shon pointed out behind me.

Vrushali was standing very close to us. I didn’t know if she heard our talk or not but she didn’t spoke a word to me. The only one to converse with her was Shon. She informed us that the chariot was prepped and ready to go and all the essential supplies have been loaded on the cart tagging behind the chariot.

I didn’t thought of confirming but probably the reason for her not speaking to me was the intimate scene we shared yesterday. She must be feeling reluctant to even approach me. I was not different too. I didn’t wanted to preach the subject and make her uncomfortable.

SHon must have deducted it as was evident form his face and the silence between me and Vrushali. He was a kind of guy who would not let this opportunity go but today for some reason he was silent. Didn’t spoke a word about the subject. Didn’t even cracked a single joke.

Our party was ready to go and leave the city. My chariot was holding me at the middle, Shon at the helm and Vrushali in the back.

Other chariots tagging along with us had only two horses pulling their weight whereas mine had three. The extra spare was a small white mare with ashen mane that was still in his childhood.

“Is that ?” I leaned and asked Shon

“Yess, It’s Bali.

I thought we will take him to the new kingdom and raise it together.”

“Great plan Shon. I had completely forgotten about him.”

We both were talking all the way about what we’ll do and see together in the new kingdom. The adventures we’ll have. The new ladies we’ll see. Finally maybe find someone that fancies our eyes.

“We haven’t grown much have we, Bhai?”

“Nah, it’s called catching up, Shon.

The responsibilities on both of us have increased significantly.

We need to be the man both of us are required to be.”

“But that doesn’t changes our relationship Bhai.

People around us will change and new ones will come but

We’ll both have each other’s back like before.”

“That’s true, Forever.” We both laughed as we thought about the promise that we had just made to each other.

“Now watch for that boulder or the horses will throw Vrushali out of the back.”

“hahahha

Then you should better hold her tight.” Shon said laughingly.

A thought of Vrushali came to my mind as we raced towards a new kingdom.

My kingdom……………