Sootputra: The Unsung Hero

Chapter 18 Worse relations

The bank of Ganga was still as soothing as ever. The cold sensation of waves as it rippled across the shores. The moonlight was bouncing off of its reflecting surface like a blue jewel in the forest. The scene reminded me of the village and the shore on which my childhood was spent. Still it felt different when the forest across the bank and the newly laid camp on this side came in my sight. The river was taking a gentle curve around it. They reminded me that I was far from home and was going to as of yet an uncertain environment.

Having no Idea what to expect when we reach there, my mind was exploding with worse ideas and there was nothing to distract myself. The only small comfort was that I wasn’t travelling alone. My most recent friend Duryodhan, MY oldest friend Vrushali and My brother Shon were all by my side in this journey. My only wish was that, that mata and father were also here to witness this scene. If only father didn’t had the burden of his duties as the caretaker of stables and a charioteer! They were so proud when they heard about my crowning to a king. The dripping tears across the cheeks and a smile as wide as the kingdom was a something these eyes haven’t seen in a long time.

I bent down to wash my face and drench my hair with cold water of the holy river. Then picked up the two pots and filled them full to the brim and carried them back towards the camp. The ambience of this camp was a little nicer than the one we had set yesterday. That one was set on the side of the road in the middle of the Forrest but this one was close to the Ganga and the light from the moon and river was illuminating it like a silver robe. We had enough material for 5 tents. 3 were already set and the rest were in the process. One was for me, other was for Duryodhan and the rest were for the horses, servants and soldiers.

“Sire, why are you carrying the water.”

A sickly frail man came and extended his hands for the pots in my arms. He was one of the servants accompanying us on the journey.

“It’s fine, I saw everyone busy so I thought that I should at least contribute in some way. ”

“Sire, if you needed any, you should’ve told us. ”

Handing him the pots………

“take this one to the horses and

This one is for you. Take it to the servants tent.”

“Yes of course, sire.

Sire, your resting place is ready.

Tell us if you need anything.”

“Nothing for now. You can go.”

“Thank you, Sire.”

My tent was the most near to the river, the cool breeze from it was infiltrating every corner. The sweet scent of the river and the sound as it hoped over the rocks was alleviating. The mat was laid on the freshly cut grass. And a central torch was illuminating the walls in a golden hue. I sat down and picked the bowl of fruits that was laid on the plate of dry leaves.

“May I come in, Angraaj”

As I digged in to eat a girl’s voice penetrated my ear. She was standing at the door way. Her silhouette pressed on the walls of the tent as it blocked the moonlight from reaching.

“You don’t have to ask permission for entering…….”

She entered. She was holding a plate covered with another as she crossed the entrance. Her face was looking down probably at the plates or at her feet. She gently laid the plate in front of me, being cautious not to flip it or drop it.

“Today’s food, Oh King.

Rice with potatoes and tomato gravy.”

“You don’t have to call me King, Vrushali.

Like I said earlier. I’m still the same person.

I am still your friend.

Call me Karna.”

Her lips fluttered but with no sound. She avoids looking at me. Her gaze was still down. Fidgeting with her hands and pallu. She stuttered..

“I…I …can’t”

Every word came with a slow voice. After the sentence she turned herself. She could’ve left but she stood there, probably waiting for me to say a word.

“Why?”

“Because I am a servant. Every servant in here calls you king so I should too.”

“But I’m not a king, not yet…”

“But you will be…..”

She broke my pace. She turned to me still looking down as if hesitant, as if my eyes can burn her down. I was startled by her statement.

“Tomorrow when we reach the Anga, you will be a King.

You will have a kingdom, a palace and pretty soon a Queen.

And I will remain a daasi(servant). ”

My body just stood there as she uttered those words. Not finding words to comprehend what she was saying. How could I, going from a soot to a King was indescribable for me. What should I say to her? That I won’t change when I wasn’t sure of that myself. The emotions were new, they were pointed and sharp but didn’t hurt. Instead it felt like I was surrounded by pointy sharp spears. They didn’t hurt me but also didn’t leave any way to escape.

Her sadness and anger soon took physical manifestation. The big drops of tears dragged across her cheeks like a raindrops on smooth glass. Her lips that glossed when she smiled were now screaming to be saved as she bit them under her teeth.

“Vrushali, If it’s about that day…….”

“Don’t you know how I feel?” Her voice broke. The frowned brows turned to relaxed ones. She was squeaking and sobbing. My feet have stepped forward to help her but she pushed me away. She had closed herself away.

“If you hate it that much then, why did you come?” I inadvertently said in my moment of frustration.

For the first time in tonight, she looked at me with her sore flaming eyes, looked like she was wishing death upon me.

I knew this was the limit. Pushing further will only result in more strain in this already thinned friendship. She must have felt the same as she just silently walked away that instant.

Thinking it will only create more trouble, I didn’t give a chase. We both needed some time to think for ourselves. We both had our own battles to win, whether it is in the real world or in our mind.

The sleep eluded me that night. That whole night, words from Vrushali rang in my mind like the bells of a temple. Echoing and drilling further and further.

Tomorrow is going to be a big day, and I don’t know if My body or mind are ready for it. The person this karna will turn into tomorrow will also determine what his family and friends mean to him.

I wish tomorrow doesn’t come………..