Sootputra: The Unsung Hero

Chapter 22: Varnavrat

“We should defeat them in battle.

We’re not cowards.”

“Like how we defeated Dhrupad?” Shakuni said. Every door and window of the room was closed. No guard was standing outside. Every one of them has been given the leave. The only light illuminating the room was that those of candles and a central torch.

“Karna, Mama is right. Those pandavs were able to subdue him even when we were not.”

“I wasn’t in the battle with you that time.

But I am now. I’ll fight for you.

But this cowardly act is beneath me.”

Shakuni makes a annoying laugh before speaking.

“See nephew. You’re seeing this.

You call him your best friend.

What were you saying? Oh..yes

‘Mama, I have ultimate faith in Karna. He can give his life for me.

And I am ready to do the same.’

But he neglects to even throw the first dice in this game of politics.” Duryodhan’s gaze went to him and with just a little look he silenced Shakuni’s voice.

“I’m not a gambler, Shakuni.

Keep your dice to you.

I am a warrior, a king.

These roles are not games to me.”

“So this is how you repay the kindness shown to you.

By rejecting to help on the first turn.

You don’t deserve the kingdom, the upliftment, given to you” Shakuni said.

“Take the kingdom if you want. My friendship isn’t based on that.

Don’t call me a king, if you want. But I’ll always be a warrior and act by those ethics.

And they forbid me to act like a wimp.”

“You’re not a wimp Karna.

But circumstances have forced us to take these steps.” Said Duryodhan.

“What circumstances?” Aswathama was quick to question as he joined with a glass in his hand. All this time he has been eating away at the buffet filled table, like an elephant. But he was quick to notice Duryodhans remark.

“Pitama Bhishma and Vidur are trying to crown Yudhister at a breakneck speed. They are forcing and enticing The King to willingly give the Throne to him.”

“Vidur Uncle even went on to say that a blind king should not rule for much long.

I hate that atrocity of his.

Ungrateful bastard.” Duryodhan said.

“Vidur?” I asked.

“Ahh… you don’t know him.

He is the step-brother of my father.

My supposed caring Uncle.”

“Why the hate for him?”

“I’ll tell you some other day.

For now just know that he is not on our side.

He is just an beggar who is living on the kindness of my father yet he

beliers us.”

“Well now you know the reason, will you side with us?”

“yess, ofcourse.” As usual Ashwathama was quick to respond. He had an dripping look in his eyes.

“Friend?”

Duryodhan was asking me. He stretched his hand. I know my answer. They come from all the years of endurance, training and education. Yet my lips falter to say them. Why?

“N…No. I can’t be a part of this.

I can’t help you.”

“Why?” Duryodhan’s eyes were puzzled. He was questioning his own extended hand as he retreated it. The look on his face reminded me of the day I was rejected by Drona. The same anguish was within me too.

“Why, karna? Why are you refusing princes, proposal?

Let them die. They deserve it.”

“Yes, They do, Ashwath. I completely agree with you.

But the location is wrong.

They are warriors, like us. They deserve death like us.

In the battlefield, defeated by an enemy they can’t overpower.

Not like dogs butchered in street.

I want to kill them too, but by no sly method.

Fair and square. It happens in the battle field or it doesn’t happen at all.”

I was firm and calm from the outside but from within, there was a storm brewing. My decisions became my doubts. Knowing what was right but, faltering to take the right steps was a new thing. I was glad on not betraying my principles but was worried that there was a crack now in the selfless friendship I so much cherished.

The atmosphere felt like the peak of a mountain, only the cold breeze of the wind can be heard. My time to leave was now, but before I can even reach the doors a lion roared.

“KARNA!!!!!”

I feared that this would come, feared that a friend would be lost.

“You don’t know how it feels. You haven’t experienced it.

You don’t know how it feels to LOOSE SOMEONE.”

But when I turned was shocked to see that Ashwathama was the one who was burning up like a hot red iron. His eyes were like hot coal.

“All your life, everyone has called you soot, denied you the right but at least you had your family.

At least everyone looked up to you, in respect, admiration. I, myself looked up to you.

You don’t know what it feels like when everyone hates you.”

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“After you left, I went to the family of the boy.

You know the one called Eklavya.

By that time he had left his home.

His family was there though,

His mother, father. The sickly pair.

They cussed me, called me and my family a bunch bullies. Their son left them because of us.

We had ruined another boys life.”

“Another?” I enquired him.

“After you left, I knew the reason for your abandonment.

My friend left his family, because my father who is supposed to be unbiased towards his students refused you. I knew where you went but I just couldn’t gather enough courage to tell them.

I …I acted like a coward. ”

“Ashwathama, I …I didn’t knew. I’m sorry.”

He was almost on the verge of breaking tears. Though I knew he wouldn’t cry, it was still a new side of him. His broken side, a weak spot. The almost joyous and excited Ashwathama that I knew from my childhood was not capable of thinking this deep. He must have experienced some heavy things in his life by now, that made him feel mortified about his status in society. He was not angry like me, but ashamed. Being a friend I should have seen that.

“It’s all because of him. That Arjuna.

He stole my father from me. He wouldn’t have acted like this if that bastard of Pandu, wasn’t there to begin with.

You know why my father took Eklavya’s thumbs, You know why he didn’t taught me the Celestial weapons. It’s all because of that son of a bitch.

I knew father taught him the secret chant of Bhramastra, I heard it. Hiding behind the hut in which he taught him.

Bastard was having a hard time grasping the meaning and chant. Even though I, hiding from them only listening to their whispers got it in the first try. But before I could learn the revocation chant, they caught me. So I ran. Before they discovered who I was.”

“That’s how I learned archery my friend, hiding, intervening.

Because my father was busy making him the best archer. Giving him the extra lectures. Even now he is tutoring him in the resonance techniques. Every time I asked why was he doing this he said that Arjuna has a knack for archery, he is the most worthy.

That statement always boiled my blood. Worthy? What does he know about worthy?

You were worthy friend, Eklavya was worthy, And maybe I too was, but did we got any rewards for being worthy?

No, never. So, why should he? What has he done in his life to get that?

The only achievement they boast about is that of defeating King Drupad on the request of my father.

But that only happened because Duryodhan and his brothers were engaging his forces while those silver spoon brats used it as a cover and got to weakened a Drupad first.”

Duryodhan was silently sitting on his bed clenching the glass very tightly as the moments went on. The silver glass bent under the immense pressure of his hands. But those sentences of Ashwath caught my ears. So, Arjuna do know how to invoke Brahmastra. So, the reason he was shocked in the arena was because Drona had secretly told him that I too knew that weapon. That’s why he was scared in the battle.

“Whatever the reason, Whatever they did or have done, we still can’t act like wimps.

If you want to desperately defeat them then, challenge them to a duel to death. Don’t use this backstabbing method.

You are a warrior, and by those ethics you should follow a code. Live by them or don’t call yourself one.

But burning them alive by luring them in a castle made of lac and hay. I can’t even think to stand by that.

If that’s the way you choose then. I’m afraid I will have to stand in the way.”

//Duryodhan had already ordered for the palace to be built and when the pandavs return from there visit to Dwarka they will be requested to attend the festival at that Palace.