Sootputra: The Unsung Hero

Chapter 34: Sandalwood.

“I couldn’t get her out of my mind for a few days after that. Like Arjun had two eyes that shaped his life. Mine was shaped by two women. Both of them left me to my misery, the day I needed them the most, they both betrayed me. Still I yearned for them. Both of them.

At the time I didn’t know what impact it will have in shaping my life, my destiny. Had I’d been a little wiser, I would’ve killed myself in that swayamvar then facing the rest of my life ahead.

I always was in a misconception that I was in control of my life, I didn’t even knew that it was already shaped by the people who weren’t even part of it.”

Krishna was just listening to the whispering of Karna. He was not capable of speaking, but Karna’s feelings were louder than any words.

“That day, part of my life unraveled before me. That day was the first time that Karna started to change. The revelation only raised more questions than it answered.

I am taking my last breath’s here Keshav so I will be bare naked in the truth with you. I won’t lie when I’m dying.

I was always a pretender. My whole life I just wanted to mean something, for someone, anyone.

I just convinced myself that by doing charity I was fulfilling my vows, that it was a good deed to be done. That not everyone has a luck like me, so I should be just as generous as I can.

The truth was that I was scared. Whenever someone came to me asking for help or money. I felt good, I liked when people depended on me. I liked when my friends asked for me. Because without that neediness I was nothing, no one. Just a regular old guy, alone in his life. That charity and generosity gave me meaning. A reason for my existence and a purpose.”

Krishna just listened as Karna opened up from his hard shell. His memorable smile like a comforting shadow in scorching sun. He picked up his flute in his hand.

“You know like this one here, I have many flutes in my home. Made of different materials. Some with metal, some with wood. One of them is made of sandalwood. It’s one of my favorite ones. Although it plays terribly.”

“So why keep it. And what it has to do with my life.” Karna said.

“Your purpose, Karna. It is the same wood you gave me.”

Karna’s eyes shifted to the flute with a raised brow. “I don’t remember ever giving you sandalwood, or any wood for that matter.” He said.

“Ahh, but you see you did. Your bath time charity vow became a little more famous than you intended. In fact so much so, that some just thought of it as an over glorified boasting of self. ” Krishna was always hard to read. His actions and sermons always had a hidden meaning for the imminent or the forcible future. Karna just can’t figure out which was this. He looked perplexed on the thought that he can’t remember the moment he is talking about.

“Don’t worry, you weren’t the only one. I was always the better at playing hide and seek since childhood. ” Krishna said. In his soft voice he continued. “You remember the Monsoon just before the swayamvar of the Kalinga’s princess. Two Brahmin’s came to your court. It was raining heavily for three days straight.”

“That’s just 7 months after I announced the vow. ” Karna said.

“The Brahmin asked for dry sandalwood for the cremation of his recently deceased mother. But there was none at the time. Due to rain either it was wet or rotten.” Krishna continued as if he wasn’t interrupted at all.

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“The one asking for wood was you, but then who was the other one? King Balram?”

“No…” Krishna said slightly shaking his head.

“Then?”

He turned to Karna “Who do you think?”

Karna realized the answer in keshav’s eyes. “Him!?”. Keshav nodded. Karna sighed. At this point there was hardly anything that could surprise him, even if the next moment he got to know that Lord Ganesh is a female or that Hanuman is secretly married. It would be hardly enough for him to bat an eye. Even the death which was only moments away would not faze his face in any way.

“Any way coming back to the topic at hand, it wasn’t just that you gave us the wood when there was none to give, but it was how you procured it, that impressed me. Me and my friend wanted to test you, but you big guy, you didn’t just passed it you…… surprised me. And have been doing that ever since,

…… well, almost.”

Krishna chuckled as Karna spoke. “Well it wasn’t like I had any options, if there had been I promise you I would not have destroyed my doors. I loved the sandalwood scent in my room. God knows, how much I missed doors for the next week.”

“Still it was enough to remove any doubt’s.”

“You had doubt’s about me?” Karna asked with raised eyebrow.

“No, not me.” Krishna’s gaze went down.

“oh, .. Ofcourse.” Karna was also watching the ground. “So what did you do with it?”

“I left all of it with him. But not before taking a single piece from it.” Krishna said.

“A storm was brewing Angraaj. I just thought that he will come to see you in a different light by this incident, if only even just by a little. A little more …….likeable, perhaps.” Krishna sighed “But boy, I was wrong. His eyes were burning like coal after that. He wanted to return as soon as possible, ‘to take back everything that belongs to me’ is what he said.”

“What did you do?” Karna said.

Krishna tapped his flute on is shoulder.“ I did what could be done to avoid a war. I counseled them, guided them, helped them. ”

“You mean, you manipulated them?” Karna’s words was like a greased spike.

“If manipulation means avoiding wars and instilling justice, then you can call it just that.” Krishna placed his flute back on the ground and tended to the vines covering Karna which have been starting to fade in glow. The touch of his fingers, rejuvenated their light. Karna felt gaining conciousness again as if he has been pulled back from the light that was pulling him. A few moments more, he thought to himself. “I tried Karna, I really tried. But if only Duryodhan had too.”

Karna spitted a clotted blood mucus on the ground “Oh, he did. He really did. Just not the way you hoped. Gosh, … The following months were so gruesome …….”

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Duryodhan got a lot busy after that. Naturally whenever he asked(which was most of the time ) I had to go and spend my time at hastinapur being the advisor' nd, shit. He wanted to eliminate all of the pandavs, now that he knew where they were and how they were living.

But since doing that would attract attention and also might reveal the real identities of those brahmins, he decided not to do so.

There was also the fact that they now had a powerful ally in the name of panchal to rely upon. Pandavas were in a really good position fir him to attack on, so he just hid the fact that we even saw.

Pandavs too tried to remain hidden. They didn't revealed themselves after the swaymvar, the uneasy feeling me, duryodhan and mama were going through cannot be explained in simple words. 'What were pandavs thinking and why haven't they came back already?' was the only thing going in our minds.

Duryodhan didn't wait to find out, though . He always was the one to race with them, to be the first in everything. This time was also true. He wanted to seize the throne as soon as possible and also to ensure that his line was the one that had the most right to the throne.

He wanted to give the kingdom the eldest grandprince, so that when the time comes, his son will be not have to face the same fate his father did.

So, when the invite of the next swayamvar came he left for it wihtout even thinking twice. No matter the kingdom, no matter how the girl looked or no matter who the king was. He just wanted a queen.

That's why this time no one except me accompanied him. No even his brothers.

But this swayamvar also proved to be a little tricky.