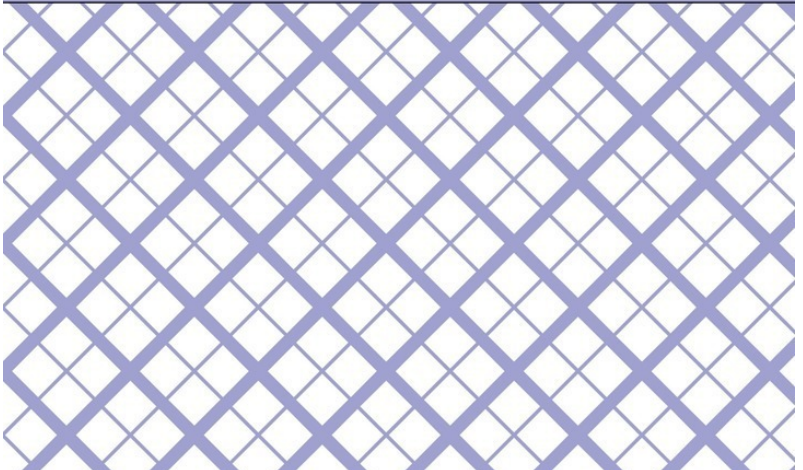


Elena Sinitsyna

*The Book
of Karna*

based on Mahabharata



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Аннотация

What we often don't see behind the legends and old tales is people participating in those distant events. But they lived, loved, suffered and died. They were alive – just like we are now.

The Book of Karna

Based on Mahabharata

Elena Sinitsyna

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A lamp glimmered dimly in his marquee. I went to tell him that everything is ready for tomorrow.

“Ah, it is you!” – A smile flashed across his tired face. “Come in, I’m very glad to see you.”

“Do our horses do well?” He poured some drink from his pitcher, “Want any?”

I nodded and accepted the goblet from his hands. Actually I would take everything he gave me, poison even.

“Take a seat. You must be tired today?”

So I should not be tired but, in his presence, I always felt myself quite so. He meant everything to me; a father and a mother, a friend and a brother, a preceptor and a master. He was my very breath and I loved him so much. Was it mutual or not? Brahmins say that love reveals to each in its own aspects.

That's why I think he loved me too, in his own way, certainly.

I met him some years ago, when he arrived at our lord's council. There were rumours whispered about him and our chief equerry often used to say, "A coachman's son, yet he became a prince. He couldn't avoid the fact that others may be envious." As a kid I was taken into the residence and then sent to work in the stables. Thus I joined the horses and began to understand them. They have language as we humans do. Later, when the king's eldest son decided to present him with a gift, I helped him to pick and choose horses for the royal chariots. It was here that he caught sight of me and took me away to the ruler's stables, along with the horses.

"Karna!" Someone was looking for him somewhere in the field camp. I jumped up.

"Sit," he said, "I will go out."

Now, I'm sitting in his tent. It is more than two weeks since we are stuck at this field, losing people and all hope. I certainly have nothing against our rulers but it is stupid to annihilate hundreds of thousands of warriors for the sake of some senseless dispute over a legacy. All the more so kinsmen argue. The laws exist and it is so simple to follow them. I do not assert that our kings are impeccable but, to my mind, the Pandavas are the same indeed!

Voices were heard outside the tent. Karna was returning with King Shalya who was assigned to my master's charioteer. If I could, I would strongly oppose the decision, or even steer horses tomorrow by myself. Despite being a charioteer myself,

I could not.

“Well, my friend,” so Shalya was saying, “think about it... Your enemy is a great warrior and it is not you who vie with him.”

“But who should he vie with if not with me?” Smiling wryly, Karna responded, walking through the tent curtain. A gap remained open in the curtain, through which I saw a king. He appeared astonished to see me.

“What does the brat do here?” He asked disdainfully.

“The young man is taking a rest here,” Karna answered dispassionately, “by my own invitation.”

Shalya hummed and went away.

Karna drew a canopy. “Would you help me with it?”, he asked and pointed to the armour in the corner.

We had been reassembling; braiding ropes, checking arrows and spare bow strings. Karna assembled his weapon whilst I told him stories. Later on, I became quiet and he asked me why. Sighing, I ventured “My lord shouldn’t give up wearing his golden armour and earrings. If we languish here...” I felt that he would interrupt me. He just began to laugh and tousled my hair.

“What do you know about it?” He demanded.

“Whether I do or not, King Shalya, your charioteer tomorrow is an untrustworthy man. That, I do understand clearly.”

He became silent, then smiled sheepishly and said, “Don’t tell this to anyone else.”

I didn’t repeat this to anyone. I wrote about it. I wrote about this and many others things. I am an author of the Eighth Book –

The Book of Karna.

However, this was to happen later but right then he asked, “Could you bring me some water?”

Joyously, I ran at top speed towards springs in a grove, near where we were camping, skidding on slippery roots of trees, soaked in rain, and when I returned, I found him weeping... That night he told me everything... He cried burying his head in my shoulders. Soaked through and confused, I kneeled facing him, trying awkwardly to calm him. As he fell asleep, later, I covered him with a blanket and kept his weapon and armour. How would he be going to combat tomorrow?

I execrate women who leave their children.

* * *

In the morning, whilst I was harnessing the horses to the chariots, he came to me, taking a ring from his finger and placed it into my palm.

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