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Together, Hips Grinding

The cemetery's silence breaks as Partha beseeches his tantric teacher, "Give me the strength to overcome the hurdles in my path."

Partha's guru, a hermit with immense powers, blesses him by placing a hand on his head. "Nothing will ever come in your way," he says, smearing Partha's forehead with charnel-ash.

Kings and lords despise his guru; an Aghori, the dweller of the cemetery ground, a practitioner of black magic. Partha adores him; his vision and wisdom.

A devout disciple of *Bhairava*, the incarnation of Lord Shiva, his guru has gained powers beyond human capabilities. He helps Partha to transcend boundaries.

"Close your eyes to everything but *Bhairava*," the guru says. "No evil will touch you; the Lord will appear. You will have your audience with him."

The guru disappears. The time Partha spends waiting feels like an eternity. The occasional hooting of an owl, perched on a *Yakshi Pala*, the devil tree, keeps him company.

Partha's hands grope in the darkness, dance in a chilly void. As a freezing breeze laps up his torso, he withdraws his hands, crosses his arms on his chest.

Finally, a voice speaks from the silence.

“You have penetrated a domain where mortals dare not tread.”

“Who’s this?” Partha asks.

He hears a sigh. A warm breath, carrying the exotic aroma of wild flowers, wafts onto his face.

“The power you seek, that which empowers,” the voice replies.

“I’ve waded through adversities, surmounted hardships, grappled with the demons of deadly sins,”

Partha says. “Will in heart, prayers on lips, strength in muscles, I seek to make my sword mightier, horse faster, kingdom wider.”

“You are here because you already have the blessings of your guru; mine too.”

Partha bows his head, in acknowledgement of the God’s kindness.

“You do not need more land to expand your kingdom,” the God says. “You did not come here on horseback, so its speed does not matter. And, I see no sword in your hand.”

“I only wish to fulfill the duty of a king,” Partha says, “with your blessings.”

“I will make your forage to this territory meaningful,” the God says. “I will grant you the power; not to conquer but to salvage.”

Partha feels the darkness weigh heavily on his eyelids. But he doesn’t dare defy his guru.

“I will grant you a boon, one that you did not seek.”

Partha now feels a warm sensation in his head as if the God is running a hand through his hair.

“What you need now is the boon of wisdom; a companion, and an heir to the throne.”

Partha folds his hands in salutation.

“But remember,” the voice continues. “Surrender never ever, to anyone other than me, lest your powers wither.”

Partha wakes up, exhausted from the journey, dizzied by attainment, spirits soaring, the boon exalting.

He ventures outside his palace, sword in hand. Morning sun shines on its blade, flashes of orange slice through the virgin mist. Dewdrops hang on the lawn's lush grass, glitter like specks of diamonds strewn on a green carpet.

His horse neighs, mane swaying, rearing to race.

Partha mounts the stallion. Hunger of fire, strength of tides and vigor of winds packed in his muscles he sets out to salvage.

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“These have the power to ignite wildfires,” Mother says as she places a pair of anklets in Maya's hands. “Hearts will burn when they jingle on your ankles while your feet demonstrate their grace.” She wraps her fingers around Maya's palm and presses.

Maya nods, eyeing her mother's slender fingers.

The universe bows to his dancing feet,” Mother speaks again, gesturing towards the statue of *Nataraja*, the King of Dances; an incarnation of *Lord Shiva*. “Kings will bow to yours.”

Why'd kings bow to a *devadasi*, a dancer in their harem? They've fed, clothed, and sheltered thousands all along, coaxing them to the sweet ring of a euphemism, the *Dasis* of *Devas*, Maids of the Heavenly, Maya thinks.

“It is not to a woman, or that class they bow to, but the eternal beauty that we are known to be blessed with,” Mother says.

She always reads Maya's thoughts. *The wisdom of a life shared with knights and kings; a heart shared with none?*

"I don't want to be a dancer, Mother." Maya casts her eyes away. "These anklets are fetters that'll tug me to their private dance floors and adjoining bedrooms."

Mother's fingers tighten around Maya's palms and the anklets choke inside, sans their jingle. The warmth of her mother's touch hurt worse than the metallic chill of anklets.

"It is more a matter of destiny than our choices," Mother says. "Wear the anklets. You cannot break the shackles. The best that you can do is, wear it and assume control; so the one holding it will never let go." She smiles. "That way, he too remains chained to your magic. And, never ever surrender your heart. When you do, you lose."

Maya slips the anklets onto her feet.

"You are to entice, not to be enamored. Stay in control." Mother places a hand on Maya's head, a gesture of blessing.

Maya takes the first step. The anklets jingle.

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"Devadasi," Maya whispers as she kneels before the statue of *Nataraja*. "Is my destiny a curse of the gods or the design of humans?"

What kind of heroes will want to salvage girls who dance for the pleasure of princes and kings?

Sweat trails down her face onto her blouse, drenching the silk garment, making it stick to her skin. The whole day she has danced in dedication to the god of dances, seeking extrication from the anklets' chokehold.

What type of men will marry women destined to be married to deities and used by humans?

“Send me my savior, oh, the great dancer,” she implores her god.

Lord *Nataraja*, immersed in the glow of an ethereal light, opens his third eye. Instead of the legendary fire, Maya sees benevolence beaming out.

“Your wish be granted,” the God raises a hand in blessing and then his looming image, clad in a tiger’s hide, dissolves.

She hears the sound of galloping hooves in the distance, like a rumble of thunder and runs towards the door. A thick haze of dust veils the horizon’s orange glow.

Her prince arrives, riding on horseback, shattering barriers, penetrating the barricades formed by the king’s soldiers.

Anklets lie silent around Maya’s ankles, beneath the leggings of her dancing attire. Her skin, bruised with the metallic sting of anklets, feels the soothing embraces of a fluttering breeze.

The gates crash open as Partha bursts through, like a roaring tidal wave. The muscles of his biceps and forearms ripple as he swings his sword, unleashing tornadoes.

The Aghori’s powers wash away the king’s charging legions. The harem’s brittleness crushes. Its doors swing open, windows undulate. Sweat glistens on Partha’s dusky skin, fire burns in his eyes.

Partha dismounts.

Shackles break, release feet; to pound, stomp, and dance sans the jingle of anklets as Maya runs to meet him.

“I bow before you, surrender my might,” Partha says, placing his sword at Maya’s feet.

“In my dreams, I’ve surrendered my heart to you,” Maya says. “Now I lay my beauty for your relish.”

“Our union will culminate to unleash a new power,” he says.

She gives up herself into his strong arms.

Sky splits, thunderbolts fall. Tremors rock the Earth, flash through the marbled floor beneath their feet.

Partha dances, the king of dances, fluid muscles quivering. Maya joins, numbness dissipating, energy rearing to burst.

Thunder rumbles, lightning flashes. Hips join, grind in frenzy. Rain splashes, filling the pores of Earth.

She tires, collapses onto his chest; breathless, motionless, and snuggles to his warmth, smelling the musky aroma of his sweat.

Stars stud the sky, the stud whinnies. Her stud gallops carrying her, mounts the horse. Behind them the collapsed pillars of the palace lie in heaps of soil.

Against the night sky, the silhouette of the harem’s ruins reminds Maya of a huge heap of corroded shackles as it disintegrates in the cries of a new life.

A wind blows cold waves as they gallop, taking the chill in their strides.

His surrender becomes her liberation. Polar opposites forge a bond, stronger than the might of might, greater than the grace of dancing feet.

Happily ever after, they live; through generations after generations.

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