Karma & Diamonds

Tasters from

Book 1 - Moon Child

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Poison

"I won't," I muttered under my breath so that Papa could not hear, digging my heels in deeper. "I'll never eat or drink again. You'll see."

Instead of going to sit at the dining table, I ran off defiantly into the kitchen where Auntie Anna was still squatting on the floor, watching over a large pot of milk on top of the clay *sagdi* stove. My heart had sunk to depths new to me. Lifeless, starting to sniffle, feeling powerless and frustrated, I threw myself in anger into a squat opposite my aunt, and faced her across the clay stove.

I felt bloody-minded, and a surge of determination welled up within me to teach them all a lesson. How could they even think about leaving me? Just then, a

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piece of glowering hot coal, about the size of a large marble, tumbled off the stove and onto the floor. Really not expecting it to hurt quite as much, I put my right hand over the flaring red-hot coal. Naturally, it instantly scathed and burnt me, sizzling off a layer or two of my skin. It branded my soft, young palm, and I screamed in agony, sending everyone rushing over in a frenzied panic.

"Oh no! My hand's burning! I'm on fire!"

"What did you do, you silly little thing?" Auntie Anna dashed over to me.

Just then, in the furore as they all rushed to get the coal off my hand, the pot of milk boiled over the top of the solid brass pot and onto the flaming hot coals beneath. It gave off an almighty, unbearable stench like I had never smelled. The blend of vapours from the burnt milk, scalded and seared skin of my palm, and charred coals, gushed into my nostrils. The disgusting odours overpowered me as I desperately took copious intakes of breath of this nasty smell, in an attempt to lessen my agony. Meanwhile, Papa, Motima and Anna scrambled to get me away from the clay stove and boiled-over milk. Papa picked me up like I was a rag doll and rushed me to the kitchen sink, holding my burnt hand firmly under cold running water for what seemed like ages and ages.

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My milk years were over. Figuratively and literally. The two things that had been my source of core maternal sustenance, my Grandma Motima and milk, both continued to exist but my relationship to both was altered and would not be the same again.

Far from teaching anyone a lesson, at the age of just nine, it was I who got an early and important lesson of life. I learnt that trying to hurt others because I was hurting was like rubbing salt on my own wounds, or searing my own hand with hot coals. It might, at best, inconvenience the person whose attention I was trying to get, but for sure, it would leave me more injured than before.

Years later, I read an anonymous quote, often misattributed to the Buddha, that resonated this valuable lesson: "Holding onto anger is like drinking poison but expecting the other person to die."

Then I came across another similar teaching, from the Gems of Buddhist Wisdom by the Buddhist Missionary Society, which the above quote was probably paraphrasing. "Hatred is like a poison that you inject into your veins, before injecting it into your enemy. It is throwing cow dung at another: you dirty your hands first, before you dirty others."

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