

Carrots Are Not Just For Eating!

By Aishwarya Raja

It all started with a simple orange carrot. Having the usual characteristics of a root vegetable, I did not think much of it as it sat there on my kitchen counter. The manner that this was a rather unusual carrot occurred when it actually spoke to me.

Yes, I know it sounds crazy.

However, the resonant tone could not have come from any other source. I remember stopping in my tracks that afternoon. I glanced nervously about the tiled kitchen floor checking everywhere for the source of the noise. When I realized it had not come from *anyone* in the room, I carefully peeped closer to where the misshapen carrot stood. It had fallen off the counter top and suddenly was submerged in a pool of yellow light that made it look as if it were a super star. The orange vegetable had sprouted eyes and a mouth that was speaking in that unmistakable voice.

I can still recall the conversation that followed soon after.

"I have come from deep within the earth in search of a man," the carrot bellowed.

I tried in vain to speak, but the words were unable to squeeze out. After a long pause, I cleared my throat.

"Huh?" was all I managed to get out. I was still a little shocked.

"You heard what I said, fellow peasant, I am on a quest to discover a man in desperate peril," it seemed to be growing impatient.

"W-w-w-hat on earth are you talking about?" I stammered.

My heart pounded wildly and I stole a quick glance at the kitchen cabinet where my mother stored the knives. Carrot cake was actually sounding good at the moment!

As I turned to grab the door handle, the enraged carrot suddenly began chanting these words.

"Find the man who needs a nose. The longer you take, the further he goes. Search for him whenever it snows. Seek the help of all but foes."

The carrot then let out a long sigh and began to moan. He appeared to be possessed from my point of view for his eyes were closed and he walked about in place. Any thought of pulverizing him disappeared from my mind as I watched him move about so miserably.

Following the staggering carrot around, I eventually found the courage to softly murmur, "Are you okay?"

The carrot slowly turned back around and gazed at me with tear-filled eyes. He started shaking his head rigorously. I bent down and gently picked him up with my forefinger and thumb.

I looked him straight in the eyes and uncontrollably uttered, "What can I do to help?"

This is the part where I tumble into a twisted fairy tale filled with hardships, bravery, and the not-so-predictable happy ending. It is one that I continued to live a week later.

"No! How many times do I have to tell you that I'm busy?" my sister yelled.

"Fine, be that way!" I shouted back as I flopped onto my unmade bed. The conversation reminded me of many I had with my older sister. Angry thoughts swirled rapidly in my head as I thought about her. How hard was it for her to drive me around the neighborhood? Everything was always an argument; something as trivial as a television show could be the next thing we fought over. I wanted to make our relationship better, but her words always stung me in the wrong places and pushed me further into the shell that I had formed over the years.

Still brooding, but not willing to remain still, I grabbed a pink pillow and picked it up off the floor. It revealed a small Barbie bed and a chipped saucer half-filled

with water that had belonged to my cat. My eyes moved slowly over the tiny dwelling looking for who had taken up camp in my room and was using these little items for the past week.

Not finding him, I jumped out of bed and began searching everywhere; under bookshelves, on tables, and even in the living room of my doll house. Finally when I thought I would not find him, I saw a glimmer of orange from the corner of my eye. I whirled around and found the carrot drowning in the fish tank.

Yes, I know what you may be thinking, but I am simply describing to you what had taken place.

He had flipped over and was screaming silently while beating his head against the glass tank. His eyes were enormously rounder than usual and his face was a bright orange. Acting quickly, I reached into the tank and grabbed him by the green stems. As I pulled him out and placed him on the bedside table, a blurry image began forming in my head.

It was one of my sister and me at the beach. We were both wearing striped bathing suits and had goofy smiles plastered onto our tanned faces. I had jumped into the ocean and was swimming deeper into the coldness trying desperately to get far away from my sister who was enjoying the splashing game. Before I knew it, I had waded further into the ocean than I was supposed

to and no longer felt the sandy ground under my feet. The water had begun pulling me under and my arms had flailed wildly around looking for an invisible buoy. Just as my head dropped below the surface, I had felt strong arms grabbing hold of my shoulders and bringing me up again. It had been my sister.

Suddenly jerking back to reality, I began to push up and down on the carrot's rough belly until he took a sharp intake of breath. Sighing deeply, I took a seat next to him and watched as he began to breathe more normally. At last, the carrot sat up, looked warily around the room, and after realizing he wasn't dead, smiled widely.

"How good it feels to be alive and well!" he chirped.

All I could do was stare back stunned.

"Oh, you must be waiting for an explanation. Of course you are waiting for an explanation. How should I begin the story?" the carrot took a seat on a crayon box. "Well, as you very well know, I am looking for a man who is in desperate need of my assistance. I was getting quite bored sitting in your room waiting, so I started looking around. It was then when I noticed that enclosed glass case....and well...I thought maybe my mystery man might be in there."

After this innocent speech, I began chuckling so loud my sister started screaming across the hallway for me stop.

Wiping tears from my eyes, I smiled at the carrot and asked, "Are you in that big of a rush to find this man?"

He looked back at me and without a trace of a smile he said, "Yes." Thinking for a minute, I pondered back to the words the carrot had chanted a week earlier when we had first met.

"Search for him whenever it snows. Search for him whenever it snows..."

Suddenly, I began jumping up and down as an idea flashed through my mind.

Paying no attention to the cries of my exasperated sister next door, I yelled, "I got the answer!"

The carrot glanced up excitedly and motioned for me to continue.

"The man you are searching for is a SNOW MAN!" I shrieked happily.

"Of course, why didn't I think of it sooner!" the carrot yelled back.

With this fresh new goal in mind, I scooped up the carrot in my hands and hurriedly fastened my navy winter coat. Then, rushing downstairs and out the back door, I walked up the neighborhood street with a carrot on my shoulder looking for snowmen in any of the front yards.

Glimpsing a black top hat in the distance, I yelled, "I found one!"

"Let's hurry before he runs away," the snowman cried excitedly.

Not getting what he said at the time, I began sprinting toward the towering sculpture of twigs and melting snow and with a final jump, I landed directly in front of him.

"Okay, Mr. Snowman, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. Take your pick." I declared.

The snowman just looked back at me with his dark coal eyes and said nothing.

"Well, well, I see you have made your decision. Hard way it is...Snowy." With that final word, I took the carrot off my shoulder and pushed him into the snowman's face.

I waited for a reaction.

The snowman remained silent.

The carrot cried, "No, no, no! This is not who I am looking for! Next!" Sighing, I pulled the stubborn vegetable out of the snowman's face and we proceeded to the next house, and the next, and the next. Every snowman was not *The Man*; the man who talked, walked, and desperately needed the carrot's help. Dismally, we began the long trek home without a single optimistic thought running through our heads. We had both known it was a hopeless cause from the beginning, but we couldn't face the distressing reality behind that. Keeping a go-lucky attitude had helped us in the past, but obviously it was only the foundation for the pain and suffering one would have to deal with later. Still thinking these miserable thoughts, we finally arrived back at the house, frozen, cranky, and without a single new idea.

It was at that moment that I said the one thing that had been on my mind for the past hour, "I give up."

The carrot looked up and cried, "No, you cannot...we cannot!"

"I'm miserable, tired, and I will give up if I want to!" I shouted back. The carrot gave me a terribly baleful look and then the tears fell down his cheeks.

As I watched the carrot cry, it opened my eyes for the first time that day. This carrot was sent to me for a reason. The man the carrot was so desperately searching for could not be found on the lawns of my next-door-neighbors. This man was not a hurried piece of sculpture made by a couple of five-year-olds. This man was made from something bigger than anything I had ever experienced before; this man was made from love. As I came to realize this, I knew what I had to do.

Scooping up the tear-stained carrot and sticking it in my pocket I rushed upstairs and into my sister's bedroom. Ignoring her protests, I dragged her through the hallway and down the stairs. Silently, I led her to the front door and then I stopped and just stared. Her face looked like a mask filled with invisible anger and resistance; I could barely remember a time when we had laughed together and she had shown that crooked smile of hers. After all those years, it seemed like I was looking at a stranger, someone who I had grown up with but did not really know.

I knew now that our problems could not be healed with words; I had to show her how much she meant to me, so I did. Grabbing her hand, I guided her to our front lawn where a pile of snow had gathered from last night. I then started rolling a pile of snow into a small ball and motioned for her to do the same. As

she picked up the snow gingerly and started turning it to form a somewhat round ball, I noticed a glimmer of the old smile on her face; this gave me hope. Putting together the rest of the snowman was like assembling an extremely easy jigsaw puzzle; the pieces seemed to be made for each other.

When we finally attached the arms and button eyes my sister turned to look at me. It was at that moment that the sun chose to break through the clouds and shine down on the both of us.

“This is an awkward sisterly moment, don’t you think?” my sister said breaking the silence.

“Yeah sis, a little weird,” I grinned back. We both broke down into a state of giggles and ceased to stop until I noticed the slightly bruised carrot sticking out of my coat pocket.

“Oh, I almost forgot the most important part,” I murmured. I stood up and leaned over and pushed the carrot into the already half-melting snowman’s face.

I waited a moment expecting to hear a cry of relief or some sort of exclamation from the carrot. I listened intently.

“I don’t hear anything!” I kneeled in the snow and broke down. I felt nothing inside my six-year-old self except the warmth of my sister’s arms and her breathing on the back of my neck.

When I stopped crying, she mumbled quietly in my ear, “I love you.”

Smiling back softly, I whispered, “Me too.”