

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's 2008 novel, *The Palace of Illusions*, is a retelling of the ancient Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*. The novel is narrated from the point of view of Panchaali, a princess who is born from fire. Her brother, Dhri, is born this way as well. They inhabit a world where divine beings and magic are commonplace. Panchaali grows up in the palace of her father, King Drupad, who wants to seek revenge on his nemesis, Drona. When Panchaali was young, the sage Vyasa foretold that Panchaali would become a great and powerful queen married to five husbands. However, Vyasa also claims that Panchaali will be the cause of great destruction in her kingdom. Throughout Panchaali's life, the god Krishna acts as a guide and confidant to Panchaali.

When Panchaali is old enough to be married, King Drupad hosts a contest to find her a husband. Karna, a great warrior, is initially the only one who passes the contest's archery test, but Panchaali humiliates him by asking who his parents are. Though he cannot answer her question, she harbors romantic feelings for him. Karna walks away humiliated. Arjun, one of the Pandava princes, steps in and wins the tournament. Panchaali travels home to Arjun's family. His mother, Kunti, insists that Panchaali marry the remaining four Pandava brothers. The Pandavas went into hiding after their cousin, Duryodhan, tried to kill them in a fire.

After Panchaali marries the Pandava brothers, King Bheeshma divides their kingdom between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the latter of whom are led by Duryodhan. The Pandavas build up the prosperous city of Indra Prastha and take up residence in the Palace of Illusions, a magical structure that Panchaali grows to love. During a visit, Duryodhan falls into a pool, and Panchaali's attendants laugh at him, causing him humiliation. The next time the Pandavas visit Duryodhan, Yudhisthir, the oldest Pandava, bets away the Pandavas' palace and freedom in a game of dice. As a result, Duryodhan takes possession of the Palace of Illusions while Panchaali and her husbands are exiled to the woods for 12 years. During her exile, Panchaali's sole focus is revenge.

After living in exile for 12 years, the Pandavas go into hiding in a neighboring palace.

While disguised as a maid, Panchaali scorns the advances of Prince Keechak, who threatens to rape her. Panchaali and her husband, Bheem, murder Keechak. As a result of this violence, the Great War breaks out between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Many people who are close to Panchaali, including Drupad, Dhri, and Karna, are killed in the war. After hearing of Krishna's death soon after the war, Panchaali's husbands decide that it is time for them to die and transition to the afterlife. Panchaali is united with Karna in heaven.