

'Wealth-winner Arjuna,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'pick up the Pāñcāla princess and carry her. We shall spend the night in the capital, heir of Bharata, free of this forest!'

So, like an elephant king, Arjuna swiftly took up Draupadī, and did not set her down till they arrived near the city. Once they had reached the capital, Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhīra said to Arjuna, 'Where shall we stow our weapons before entering the city? If we enter it armed, my brother, we shall cause the people alarm, make no doubt; and we have vowed that if even one of us is recognized, we must return to the forest for a further twelve years.'

'Prince of men,' replied Arjuna, 'here on this peak is a huge, dense *śamī* tree. It has awesome branches, so it is hard to climb, and it stands next to the burning-ground; no one comes here, lord, for it is growing off the path, in forest frequented by beasts and savage creatures. Let us stow our weapons in it and then set out for the city; in this way we shall be able to pass our days here free from worry, heir of Bharata.'

After speaking these words to righteous King Yudhiṣṭhīra, he set about storing the weapons, bull-like heir of Bharata. His noble, thundering bow Gāndīva, the slayer of enemy hosts with which the heir of Kuru had triumphed over gods, men and serpents from his single chariot, and conquered other wealthy kingdoms, Kuntī's son Arjuna now unstrung and rendered harmless. Heroic Yudhiṣṭhīra released the unbreakable string of the bow with which the afflicter of his enemies had defended Kurukṣetra, the land of the Kurus. With his bow mighty Bhīma had defeated the Pāñcālas in battle, and checked many enemies when fighting alone during the conquest of the world;¹ foes had fled when they heard its roar in battle, like the rending of a mountain or a clap of thunder; with it he had also given a beating to King Jayadratha of Sindhu.² Now Bhīma unfastened its string. Brave Nakula, the Pāñdava who bellowed in battle, removed the string of the bow with which he had subjugated the western quarter, and then the mighty hero Sahadeva unstrung the weapon with which that amiable prince had subjugated the South.³

¹ See 2.26-7.

² See 3.256.

³ See 2.28-9.

Together with their bows they stored their long swords of steel, their costly arrow-cases and their razor-edged arrows. Nakula himself climbed the tree to place the weapons there: he tied them firmly with strong knots on to parts of the tree he thought looked sturdy, and where he saw that the rain would pass by. And the Pāñdavas also tied up the body of a dead man there, so that when people smelt the foul stench they would know that a corpse was tied there, and would stay far away from that *śamī* tree. 'She is our mother, who was aged 180, and we are hanging her in this tree because this is the custom in our family, practised even by our forebears!' – this is what those afflicters of their enemies said to everyone they spoke to, even cowherds and shepherds.

Now the foe-crushing sons of Kuntī approached the city. Yudhiṣṭhīra assigned secret names to each of them: Jaya, Jayanta, Vijaya, Jayatsena and Jayadbala. Then, in accordance with their vows, they entered that great city to pass the thirteenth year incognito in the kingdom of Virāta.

[6] King Yudhiṣṭhīra was the first to approach Virāta as he sat in his hall. He had placed his dice of gold and beryl under his arm and covered them with his garment. So the famed lord of that kingdom was approached by the lord of men of great renown, the glory of the Kuru line, noble-minded and honoured by kings among men but unassailable as a deadly snake, the bull-like hero excelling in strength and beauty, blazing in form like an immortal, a sun obscured by densely massed clouds, a fire covered over by ash.

When King Virāta saw Pāñdu's son striding towards him like the moon obscured by clouds, he asked his ministers, Brahmins and Sūtas, and those of the people who sat as members of his council, 'Who is this that has arrived here and is looking at my hall for the first time? This most excellent of men cannot be a Brahmin. It seems to me that he is a lord of the earth: he has no slave, no chariot, no earrings, and yet close up he shines as bright as Indra himself. Bodily signs declare him to have received the royal consecration on his head, or so I think. He approaches me as free from care as a rutting elephant approaching a lotus pool!'

Then as Virāta mused thus, the bull-like hero Yudhiṣṭhīra approached him and said, 'My sovereign, know that I am a Brahmin, come here to seek a living after losing all I owned. My wish, sinless lord, is to dwell here with you and do your bidding.'

The king was delighted. 'Welcome!' he said at once. 'Accept what you seek; I am happy to greet you, my son. From what king's realm have you come here? Tell me truly your family and your name, and also whatever occupation is yours.'

- 10 'I used to be Yudhiṣṭhira's friend,' answered Yudhiṣṭhira, 'and I am a Brahmin, a descendant of Vyāghrapad. I am a gambler, skilled at throwing the dice, and I am known by the name of Kaṅka, O Virāta.'

'I shall grant you whatever boon you desire,' said Virāta. 'Rule over Matsya: I submit to your authority! I have always been fond of clever gamblers, and you, godlike sir, merit a kingdom!'

'Lord of the peoples,' replied Yudhiṣṭhira, 'I will never dispute with those I have defeated: no one vanquished by me may keep his wealth. Let me obtain this highest of boons through your grace, king of Matsya!'

- 15 'If anyone offends you,' said Virāta, 'I shall kill him, even if he holds indemnity; if he is a Brahmin, I shall exile him from the kingdom. Let all the citizens hear me: as I am lord over this realm, so is Kaṅka! You shall be my friend, and ride with me in the same carriage; you shall enjoy clothing, food and drink in plenty. You may always see whatever is within and whatever is without: I hold my door open for you! If men grown thin for lack of livelihood petition you, you may always answer them on my authority: I shall give everything you promise, make no doubt. While you are with me, you will have nothing to fear.'

Thus the bull-like hero gained his audience with King Virāta, and a boon. From then on he lived there, highly respected and happy; and no one found out what he was doing.

[7] Now there approached a second man, fearful in strength and blazing with glory, but with the graceful tread of a lion. In his hand he bore a spoon, a ladle and an unsheathed sword of purest dark metal. He appeared to be a cook, but in his supreme radiance he was like the sun that illuminates this world. Dressed all in black, as strong as Mount Himālaya, he approached the king of Matsya and stood before him.

When the king saw him arrive he was well pleased, and he addressed all the citizens: 'Who is this bull-like young man that I see, high-shouldered like a lion and extraordinarily handsome? I have never before seen so sun-like a man! No matter how I ponder, I cannot grasp his perfection, nor reach truly into the mind of this bull-like hero.'

Then Pāṇḍu's high-minded son went up to Virāta and spoke these words like a man in deep distress: 'Lord of men, I am a cook named Ballava. Employ me, for I prepare excellent sauces!'

'Bestower of honour,' said Virāta, 'I cannot believe that you are a cook, for you seem to resemble thousand-eyed Indra himself; and in glory and beauty and valour, my son, you shine out like a leader among men!'

'Lord of men,' replied Bhīma, 'a cook I am, and your servant. Above all I know how to make exceptional soups, O king, all of which were formerly tasted by King Yudhiṣṭhira himself. Also, no one is my equal in strength: I have always been a fighter, and I have been matched against elephants and lions. Sinless prince, I shall ever act to please you!'

Virāta said, 'I grant you your boon, and you shall work skilfully in the kitchen as you say. I do not think that this work is worthy of you, for you merit the sea-rimmed earth itself! But it is done as you desire: be the superintendent in my kitchen, appointed by me to be in charge of my servants who are already in place there.'

Thus was Bhīma assigned to the kitchen: he came to be much loved by King Virāta. There he dwelt, O king, and neither the common folk nor any of the servants there found him out.

[8] Dark-eyed Draupadī's hair was soft and flawless, and curled at the ends; now she tied it up and concealed it at her right side. She put on a single black garment, large and very dirty, and having thus attired herself as a maid-servant, she began to wander about as if suffering some affliction. When they saw her rushing about, men and women hurried up to her and asked her, 'Who are you, and what do you want?' She answered that she was a maid-servant, lord of men, and that she had come hoping to work for anyone who would feed her. But because of her beauty, her appearance and her soft voice, no one could believe that she was a maid-servant come looking for food.

However, Virāta's wife Sudeṣṇā, a highly respected Kekaya princess, observed Draupadī's daughter as she looked down from the palace roof. When she saw such a lovely woman dressed in a single garment and with no one to protect her, she summoned her and said, 'Lady, who are you, and what do you want?' Draupadī answered that she was a maid-servant, lord of men, and that she had come hoping to work for anyone who would feed her.

'People of beauty like yours do not live as you describe, lovely girl,' said Sudeṣṇā; 'they have plenty of such slaves and slave-girls to 10 command! Your ankles are unobtrusive, your thighs firm; you are deep in three ways,¹ high in six,² and pink in the five pink places;³ your voice falters like a goose; you have good hair and breasts, and a lovely complexion; your hips and bosom are full; like a Kashmiri mare you excel in every respect; your eyelashes are curved, your lower lip red as a *bimba* fruit, your waist slender; your neck is marked like a conch-shell; your veins cannot be seen; your face is like the full moon. Tell me, lady, who you are – you cannot possibly be a maid-servant! Are you a *Yakṣī* or a goddess, a Gandharva woman or an *Apsaras*? Are you *Alambusā*, *Miśrakeśī* or *Puṇḍarīkā*?⁴ Are you *Mālinī*?⁵ Are you the consort of Indra or Varuna, or of *Tvaṣṭṛ* or the creator *Prajāpati*? Of all the goddesses renowned among the gods, which one are you, fair lady?'

15 'I am no goddess,' replied Draupadī, 'nor a Gandharva or *Rākṣasa* woman or a demoness. I am a maid-servant who works for others: I tell you this truthfully. I know hairdressing, and I am good at grinding unguents; also, I shall thread the loveliest garlands of many colours. I won the good opinion of *Satyabhāmā*, *Kṛṣṇa*'s beloved queen, and of Draupadī *Kṛṣṇā*, the wife of the *Pāṇḍavas*, unmatched for beauty among the Kurus. This is how I go about, earning a very fine living; and I stay wherever I am for as long as I get clothing. *Mālinī* is the name that the queen herself gave me. Now, Queen Sudeṣṇā, I have arrived at your house.'

20 Sudeṣṇā said, 'I would give you my own head to dwell on – I have no doubt of this at all – but that the king would then single-mindedly pursue you. See, the women of the royal household and those who live in my own house are gazing intently at you, so what man would you not captivate? And see the trees that grow here round my house; even they

¹ According to the commentator *Nīlakantha*, voice, intellect and navel.

² Nose, eyes, ears, nails, breasts and nape of the neck.

³ Soles of feet and hands, corners of eyes, lips, tongue and nails.

⁴ Names of *Apsarases*.

⁵ Name of a female *Rākṣasa*, mother of the virtuous *Vibhīṣaṇa* in the story of *Rāma* (see 3.259–75).

seem to be bowing before you, so what man would you not captivate? Lady of fine hips, once King *Virāta* sees your more-than-human beauty he will leave me and single-mindedly pursue you, for whichever man you gaze at intently with your long eyes will fall into love's clutches, lady of flawless limbs! And any man who sees you constantly, with your lovely smile and your utterly flawless limbs, will fall into the clutches of love! The female crab spawns only to die, and so I believe it will be for me if you dwell here, sweet-smiling girl.'

25 'I am not to be had by *Virāta*, nor by any other man at all,' answered Draupadī. 'I have five young Gandharvas for my husbands, fair queen; they are sons of a certain Gandharva king of great mettle, and they guard me constantly, so men approach me at their peril. My Gandharva husbands will be pleased to let me stay anywhere where no one gives me leftover food or asks me to wash their feet; but if a man should lust after me like other common women, he will enter on his next life that very night! No man can seduce me, lady, for my Gandharvas are grim, and they are powerful.'

30 Sudeṣṇā said, 'In that case, daughter, I give you leave to stay here as you wish; nor will you ever have to touch leftover food, or anyone's feet.'

Thus *Virāta*'s wife encouraged Draupadī *Kṛṣṇā*, O *Janamejaya*, and no one there knew who she truly was.

[9] As for *Sahadeva*, he approached *Virāta* dressed in the very clothes worn by cowherds and speaking in their tongue. When the king saw the blazing bull-like hero coming, he went up to that heir of *Kuru* and asked him, 'Whose son are you, where have you come from, and what do you want, my son? Tell me truly, bull-like hero, for I have never seen you before.' *Sahadeva*, the afflicter of his enemies, stood before the king and spoke in a voice like a monsoon storm: 'I am a *Vaiśya*, *Ariṣṭanemi* by name; I was the overseer of cattle of those bull-like Kurus, the sons of *Kuntī*. I wish to live in your household, chief of the peoples, for I no longer know anything of those lion-like kings. I cannot live by any other profession, and I do not care for any king but you.'

5 'Whether you are a Brahmin or a *Kṣatriya*,' replied *Virāta*, 'you are as handsome as the lord of the sea-rimmed earth. Tell me the truth, tormentor of your enemies! *Vaiśya* work would not be worthy of

you. From what king's realm have you come here? Tell me whatever occupation is yours, how you will live permanently in our household, and what your wage here will be.'

Sahadeva said, 'The eldest of Pāñdu's five sons was King Yudhiṣṭhīra. He had a hundred hundred herds comprising eighty thousand cattle, other herds of ten thousand, and yet others of twice as many. I was their overseer; people knew me as Tantipāla. There is nothing for ten leagues in every direction that I do not know concerning the overseeing of my herds, be it past, present or future. My virtues were well known to that noble man, and King Yudhiṣṭhīra of the Kurus was pleased with me. For my cows breed fast, and they are never sick: I know the various means to attain this. These are the skills which I have. And I know too which bulls bear favourable marks, so that barren cows will calve after merely scenting their urine.'

'I have collected a herd of a hundred thousand,' answered Virāta; 'chosen according to the qualities of each type of cattle. I hand my beasts and herdsmen over to you; from now on let all my cattle be in your charge!'

So, lord of the peoples, that prince of men lived there pleasantly unknown to the king; nor did anyone else ever find him out. And Virāta paid him the wage he requested.

[10] Now someone else appeared at the rampart wall, supremely beautiful, a huge, strong-armed man wearing women's ornaments, decked with earrings, long shell bracelets and lovely anklets of gold, tossing his long, thick hair, treading like an elephant in rut, shaking the earth with his steps as he approached Virāta in his hall. When the king saw him arrive on the floor of the hall, an enemy-ravager concealed in a disguise, Indra's son shining with supreme radiance and treading like a mighty elephant, he asked all those who were near about him, 'Where does he come from? I have never heard of such a man before!' And when none of those men said they knew him, he then spoke these words in his amazement:

'You are a man in every respect; handsome, dark and young, you are like the lord of an elephant herd. Unfasten your shell bracelets and lovely anklets of gold! Unbraid your hair and take off your earrings! Comb your hair into a proper crest, dress yourself differently, and become a

bearer of bow and armour and arrows! Mount a chariot, sir, and race! Be like my sons to me, or like myself! For I am old, and I wish to hand over my duties; become ruler of all Matsya straightway! Men such as you do not resemble eunuchs at all, it seems to me.'

'I sing and I dance,' replied Arjuna, 'and I play instruments. I am a good dancer, I am an expert singer. Give me to your daughter Uttarā, lord of men, and I shall be the queen's dancing-master! As for this appearance of mine: what is the point of speaking of it? It would only increase my great grief. Know me as Brhannadā, lord of men, a son or daughter without father or mother.'

Virāta said, 'I grant you your boon, Brhannadā: teach my daughter and her friends to dance. But I do not think that this work is worthy of you, for you merit the sea-rimmed earth itself!' 10

The king of Matsya tested Brhannadā in dancing and music and other such arts; and having thus learnt that he was indeed no man, he then sent him to the princess's quarters. The lord of men, wealth-winner Arjuna, taught singing and music to Virāta's daughter and her friends and attendants, and they grew fond of Pāñdu's son. Thus the wealth-winner lived there in disguise, self-possessed and sharing in their enjoyments. No one there, whether inside or outside the household, found him out as he stayed there in this way.

[11] Now another Pāñdava lord appeared while King Virāta was inspecting his horses. The common folk saw him striding towards them; he looked like the disc of the sun emerging from a cloud. He inspected the horses in every direction, and the enemy-slaying king of Matsya watched him as he did so, and then said to his followers, 'Where does this godlike man come from? He inspects my horses closely – he must surely be a wise expert on horses! Have him brought straight in to me, for this hero blazes like an immortal!'

The enemy-slayer approached the king and said, 'May victory be yours, prince, and blessings on you! I have always been respected for my work with horses, O king; I shall be your skilled master of horses!'

'I shall give you chariots, wealth and a dwelling,' answered Virāta, 'for you deserve to be my master of horses. Where are you from? Whose son are you? How did you come here? Tell me this, and also whatever occupation is yours.'

Nakula said, 'The eldest of Pāṇḍu's five sons was King Yudhiṣṭhira. I used to be employed by him among his horses, O tormentor of your enemies. I know the nature of horses, and their whole training, how to correct the vicious ones, and how to cure their every illness. No horse of mine is ever timid; no mare of mine is vicious, never mind the stallions. People call me by the name of Granthika, and so did Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhira.'

'Let whatever horses I have be subject to you from this day on,' replied Virāta; 'and let whatever grooms I have be in your charge, and 10 all my charioteers! If this is pleasing to you, godlike man, then tell me what payment you have in mind. This work with horses does not seem worthy of you, for to me you seem like a much-respected king! To see you here, so fair to behold, is to me the same as seeing Yudhiṣṭhira himself. But how can Pāṇḍu's blameless son pass his days dwelling in the forest, bereft of servants?'

Thus did the delighted King Virāta honour the young Pāṇḍava who resembled a Gandharva lord. Nor did anyone else ever find him out as he went about within the household, acting pleasantly and agreeably to all.

So the Pāṇḍavas of unerring vision lived in Matsya as they had sworn. Lords of the sea-rimmed earth, now much distressed, they concentrated on living incognito.

Janamejaya spoke:

[12] O Brahmin, while they lived thus in Matsya's city, what did those mighty heroes the Pāṇḍavas do next?

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

The heirs of Kuru dwelt there thus disguised, and they won the good opinion of the king. Listen to what they did.

As Yudhiṣṭhira attended Virāta's court, he became a favourite of the other courtiers, and also of Virāta himself and his sons, lord of the peoples, for Pāṇḍu's son knew the inner secrets of the dice, and made everyone play dice-games just as he pleased, as if they were 5 his captive birds. Unknown to Virāta, that tiger-like hero, the lord of *dharma*, won wealth which he distributed in due measure among

his brothers. As for Bhīma, he sold for Yudhiṣṭhira the meat dishes and various other foodstuffs that the king of Matsya left uneaten. Arjuna sold worn garments which he obtained within the women's quarters and gave the profit to the Pāṇḍavas. Pāṇḍu's son Sahadeva, dressed in his cowherd's clothes, gave the Pāṇḍavas curd, milk and ghee, and Nakula gave them the wealth he obtained when the king was pleased with his work among the horses. Poor Draupadī Kṛṣṇā 10 looked after all the brothers, but the lovely girl did so in such a way as to remain unrecognized. Supporting one another in this way and watching over Kṛṣṇā, the mighty chariot-fighters lived in concealment, lord of men.

Now in the fourth month there fell the great festival of Brahmā, which was richly celebrated by the people of Matsya. Wrestlers assembled there by the thousand from every direction, O king, endowed with mighty bodies and great bravery, like the Kālakhaṇja demons. Glorying in their heroism and priding themselves on their strength, they were greeted with honour by the king. Lion-shouldered, lion-waisted, lion-necked, bodies gleaming, these spirited men had more than once won the prize in the arena while princes watched.

One of them was a huge man who challenged all the other wrestlers, but none of them would go near him as he leapt about the arena; and when all the wrestlers became downcast and dispirited, the king of Matsya commanded the man to fight his cook. Then Bhīma reluctantly assented to his urging, since he could not openly refuse the king; that tiger-like hero with his tiger-soft tread entered the great arena to Virāta's delight. Kuntī's son Bhīma tied on his belt while the crowd cheered, and then he challenged that wrestler, who looked like the demon Vṛtra. Both men were grimly determined, both full of fierce valour, like two 20 mighty sixty-year-old elephants in rut.¹

Bhīma the roaring enemy-slayer lifted the bellowing wrestler off his feet and dragged him by his arms, like a tiger dragging an elephant; to the utter amazement of the other wrestlers and the people of Matsya, the strong-armed hero held him aloft and spun him round. And when he

¹ This is presumably intended to refer to elephants in their prime, but in fact an elephant of sixty would be nearing the end of its life.

had spun him a hundred times, till he swooned and lost consciousness, the strong-armed wolf-belly Bhīma crushed that wrestler on the ground.

When he saw that the world-famous wrestler Jīmūta had been laid low, Virāta was overjoyed, and so were his kinsmen. In his joy the high-minded king gave generously to Ballava in the great arena, as Kubera the god of wealth himself might have done. Then Bhīma brought the king of Matsya the highest pleasure by similarly laying low many other wrestlers and men of great might; and when no further men could be found there to match him, the king had him fight tigers, lions and elephants. After that, the wolf-belly was sent by Virāta to the women's quarters to fight against mighty, furious lions in the midst of the women there.

Pāṇḍu's son Arjuna Bībhatsu also pleased Virāta and all his womenfolk with his singing and fine dancing. Nakula gave pleasure to the king with the swift and well-trained horses that he collected in many places, truest of kings, and Virāta, pleased, gave a generous gift to him, and another to Sahadeva, O lord, on seeing his well-tamed bulls. In this way the bull-like heroes lived there in concealment, performing their tasks for King Virāta.

THE KILLING OF KĪCAKA

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[13] Ten months passed by while Kuntī's sons, those mighty chariot-fighters, lived in disguise in Matsya's city; but Draupadī, who deserved to be waited on, lived miserably in the service of Sudeṣṇā, lord of the peoples. Now Virāta's general, Kīcaka, saw the lotus-faced Pāñcāla princess as she went about in Sudeṣṇā's house, and as soon as he saw her, in form like a divine maiden, a walking deity, the arrows of the god of love pierced him, and he desired her. Scorched with the flames of desire, the general approached Sudeṣṇā¹ and, laughing a little, spoke these words: 'I have never previously seen this lovely girl here in King Virāta's dwelling. She utterly intoxicates me with her beauty, as fresh

¹ Sudeṣṇā is said to be Kīcaka's sister; however, as she is a Kekaya Kṣatriya and he a Sūta, this is a little strange.

liquor intoxicates with its smell! Fair lady, who is this divinely beautiful maiden who has captured my heart? Tell me who the lovely one is and where she is from! She has churned up my mind and taken control of me, and from now on I know there is no other medicine for me.

'Ah, this lovely maid of yours pleases me with her fresh beauty. It is not right for her to work for you; let her command me and whatever I own! I have a great house, richly endowed with many elephants, horses and chariots, opulent in its variety of food and drink, entrancing with its bright ornaments of gold – let her shed her radiance upon it!'

Then, bidding Sudeṣṇā depart, Kīcaka approached the princess Draupadī and spoke to her winningly, like a jackal addressing a young lioness in the forest: 'This beauty and this youth of yours are unsurpassed; but unshared, lovely girl, they are as useless as the finest garland unworn! Radiant though you are, beautiful one, you do not shine. I shall give up all my former wives: let them become your slaves, sweet-smiling beauty! And I too stand here as your slave – O fair-faced one, I shall be for ever yours to command!'

'Son of a Sūta,' answered Draupadī, 'You desire that which you should not, for I am a lowly maid-servant, a despised hairdresser. I am a married woman, good sir, so these words of yours are not proper. Consider *dharma*: it is their wives that living creatures should hold dear. You should never under any circumstances set your mind on the wife of another, for the rule observed by men of virtue is to shun what should not be done. The wicked man who succumbs to folly and entertains wrong desires falls into terrible infamy and extreme danger.'

'Be not aroused, son of a Sūta; do not throw away your life today by desiring me, for I am unattainable, and heroes protect me. You cannot have me! My husbands are Gandharvas, and if you anger them they will slay you. So stop: do not destroy yourself. The road you wish to travel is impassable to men; you are trying to act like a wilful, foolish child who stands on one bank of a river and wants to cross to the other. Whether you sink into the earth, or fly aloft, or flee across the ocean, you will find no escape from my husbands, for they are the sons of gods, and violent. Why do you long for me so much, Kīcaka, like some sick man longing for the night of his death? Why do you set your mind on me, like a child that lies in its mother's lap and wants to hold the moon?'

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liquor intoxicates with its smell! Fair lady, who is this divinely beautiful maiden who has captured my heart? Tell me who the lovely one is and where she is from! She has churned up my mind and taken control of me, and from now on I know there is no other medicine for me.

'Ah, this lovely maid of yours pleases me with her fresh beauty. It is not right for her to work for you; let her command me and whatever I own! I have a great house, richly endowed with many elephants, horses and chariots, opulent in its variety of food and drink, entrancing with its bright ornaments of gold – let her shed her radiance upon it!'

Then, bidding Sudeṣṇā depart, Kīcaka approached the princess Draupadī and spoke to her winningly, like a jackal addressing a young lioness in the forest: 'This beauty and this youth of yours are unsurpassed; but unshared, lovely girl, they are as useless as the finest garland unworn! Radiant though you are, beautiful one, you do not shine. I shall give up all my former wives: let them become your slaves, sweet-smiling beauty! And I too stand here as your slave – O fair-faced one, I shall be for ever yours to command!'

'Son of a Sūta,' answered Draupadī, 'You desire that which you should not, for I am a lowly maid-servant, a despised hairdresser. I am a married woman, good sir, so these words of yours are not proper. Consider *dharma*: it is their wives that living creatures should hold dear. You should never under any circumstances set your mind on the wife of another, for the rule observed by men of virtue is to shun what should not be done. The wicked man who succumbs to folly and entertains wrong desires falls into terrible infamy and extreme danger.'

'Be not aroused, son of a Sūta; do not throw away your life today by desiring me, for I am unattainable, and heroes protect me. You cannot have me! My husbands are Gandharvas, and if you anger them they will slay you. So stop: do not destroy yourself. The road you wish to travel is impassable to men; you are trying to act like a wilful, foolish child who stands on one bank of a river and wants to cross to the other. Whether you sink into the earth, or fly aloft, or flee across the ocean, you will find no escape from my husbands, for they are the sons of gods, and violent. Why do you long for me so much, Kīcaka, like some sick man longing for the night of his death? Why do you set your mind on me, like a child that lies in its mother's lap and wants to hold the moon?'

[14] Rejected by the princess, Kīcaka spoke to Sudesnā, overwhelmed as he was by his dreadful, immoral lust: 'Sudesnā of Kekaya, arrange for me to lie with your maid-servant! Try to get her for me, or I shall take my life!'

Again and again he repeated these words, and then Virāta's spirited queen, hearing his lamentations, took pity on him. To pursue her goal Sudesnā considered both his purpose and Draupadī's distress, and she 5 said to the Sūta, 'Have liquor and food prepared for the holiday; I will send her to you to fetch liquor for me. And when I have sent her there, and she is alone with you and under no constraint, ingratiate yourself with her: maybe she will make love with you.'

So then Kīcaka went home as his sister had bidden him, and had liquor brought, well filtered and fit for a king; and he had skilled servants prepare excellent goat, lamb and many different kinds of venison, as well as other very fine food and drink. When this was done he informed 10 Queen Sudesnā, and she sent her maid-servant to Kīcaka's house: 'My fair maid-servant, get up and go to Kīcaka's dwelling to fetch me drink, for thirst is tormenting me!'

'Princess, I cannot go to his dwelling,' replied Draupadī. 'You yourself know how shameless he is, O queen; and while I stay in your house, lovely maiden of flawless limbs, I will not act lustfully and sin against my husbands. You yourself know the stipulation I made, O queen, when I first entered your house. Kīcaka is a fool whose lust makes him arrogant, and when he sees me he will dishonour me. I will not go there, lovely 15 woman with fair tresses! You have many servant-girls at your command, princess; send someone else, good lady, for he will dishonour me.'

'He would never harm you when I have sent you there,' said Sudesnā, and handed her a gold drinking-vessel with a lid.

Draupadī set out for Kīcaka's dwelling to fetch liquor, fearful, weeping and praying for divine protection: 'As I know no man other than the Pāṇḍavas, by this truth let Kīcaka not overpower me when he sees me!' Then she worshipped the Sun for a moment. The Sun learnt the whole 20 tale from the slender-waisted woman, and he commanded a Rākṣasa to give her invisible protection and not to leave the blameless lady under any circumstances.

When the Sūta saw Draupadī Kṛṣṇā arrive like a frightened doe,

he stood up joyfully, like a shipwrecked traveller rescued by a boat. [15] 'Welcome, lady of fair tresses!' he cried. 'Night has become day for me now that you have come to be my mistress. Do my pleasure! My servants shall fetch you gold garlands, shell bracelets, earrings, anklets of gold, silk garments and antelope-skins. I have a splendid bed made ready for you: come with me there and drink my honey-wine!'

'The princess has sent me to you to fetch liquor,' answered Draupadī. 'She said, "Fetch me drink quickly, for I am thirsty."

'Someone else will take filtered liquor to the princess!' said the Sūta's son, and he took hold of her right hand. Shaking at his touch she threw Kīcaka to the floor and fled for protection to the hall where King Yudhiṣṭhira was. But as she fled, Kīcaka laid hold of her by the hair, and before the king's eyes he threw her down and kicked her. Then the Rākṣasa assigned by the Sun swept Kīcaka aside with the speed of the wind; at the force of the Rākṣasa's blow he fell writhing to the ground, and lay motionless as an uprooted tree.

Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira were seated there. They saw Kṛṣṇā, and could not bear to see her kicked by Kīcaka. High-minded Bhīma, eager to kill the wicked Kīcaka, ground tooth against tooth in fury; but Yudhiṣṭhira lord of *dharma* squeezed Bhīma's thumb with his own to prevent him, O king, for fear that they would be discovered.

Weeping, Drupada's daughter of fine hips reached the door of the hall. She gazed at her husbands as they sat there wretched at heart, and addressed the Matsya king, protecting their disguise and the pledge they had sworn in accordance with *dharma*, but seeming to blaze with the fierceness of her eye: 'I am the proud wife of men whose enemy can never sleep as long as he lives to set foot on the earth – and the son of a Sūta has kicked me. I am the proud wife of men who are givers, not beggars, who support the Brahmins and speak the truth – and the son of a Sūta has kicked me. I am the proud wife of men whose drums roar and whose bowstrings twang without cease – and the son of a Sūta has kicked me. I am the proud wife of men who are ardent, forbearing, mighty and proud – and the son of a Sūta has kicked me. I am the proud wife of men who could slay this whole world, but who are bound by the fetters of *dharma* – and the son of a Sūta has kicked me.'

'They are the refuge of those who approach them seeking refuge, but

now they wander the earth in concealment: where are those warriors today? How could those mighty heroes of boundless power bear to see their beloved, virtuous wife kicked by the Sūta's son, as if they were eunuchs? Where is their anger, where their heroism and ardour, that they did not try to protect their wife when she was kicked by a wicked man?

‘What can I do when Virāta watches while *dharma* is defiled, and tolerates the kicking of an innocent woman? O king, your behaviour towards Kīcaka is not at all kingly! Yours seems to be the *dharma* of barbarians; it does not appear in a good light in the assembly. Kīcaka is in breach of his *dharma*, but so indeed is the Matsya king, and the courtiers too must be ignorant of *dharma* if they choose to wait upon him. I shall not scold you, King Virāta, in your own assembly, but it was not right that I should be struck by this man in your presence: let the courtiers behold Kīcaka's transgression!’

‘I know nothing of the dispute between the two of you,’ said Virāta, ‘for I was not present; without knowing the truth of the matter, what competence can I have to judge it?’

But then the courtiers, who did know what had happened, praised Draupadī Kṛṣṇā highly, crying, ‘Bravo! Bravo!’ and denouncing Kīcaka: ‘The man who has for his wife this long-eyed woman, beautiful from head to foot, has the highest fortune, and will never have cause for regret!’

Thus the courtiers gazed at Kṛṣṇā and praised her; but Yudhiṣṭhira was so angry that sweat broke out on his forehead. Kuru's heir addressed Princess Draupadī, his own beloved queen: ‘Go, maid-servant, do not linger here! Go to Sudeṣṇā's dwelling. The wives of heroes suffer for love of their husbands, but they win the heaven of their husbands with their obedient suffering. I think that your husbands do not consider this the occasion for anger; that is why they do not rush to your aid – those Gandharvas radiant as the sun. Maid-servant, you have misjudged the occasion, running to and fro like some dancing-girl, and you are interrupting the Matsyas' game of dice here in the royal assembly! Go, maid-servant; your Gandharvas will do what you wish.’

‘Too kind are those whose lawful wife I am!’ retorted Draupadī. ‘And yet they may fall victim to anyone in the world, for the eldest of

them is a gambler!’ With these words Kṛṣṇā of fine hips rushed out to Sudeṣṇā's dwelling, untying her hair, her eyes red with fury. Then she wept ceaselessly, till her face shone as bright as the disc of the moon in the sky when it emerges from a cloud-bank.

Sudeṣṇā said, ‘Who has struck you, lady of fine hips? Lovely woman, why do you weep? For what reason are you not happy today? Who has vexed you?’

‘Kīcaka struck me when I went there to fetch liquor for you,’ replied Draupadī. ‘He struck me before the king's eyes in the hall, just as if no one else were there!’ 40

‘Lady of fair tresses,’ said Sudeṣṇā, ‘if you wish it I shall kill this Kīcaka, who in his crazed lust desires an unattainable woman like you.’

‘Others will kill him,’ answered Draupadī: ‘those whom he has wronged. I think that this very day he will surely pass over to the other world!’

[16] During the night, Draupadī goes to Bhīma and wakes him. She urges him to kill Kīcaka, and he asks her to tell him everything that has happened to her. [17] She pours out her scorn for Yudhiṣṭhira: it is thanks to him that she was molested by Duḥśāsana, then by Jayadratha, and now again by Kīcaka. His disastrous gambling has reduced him from the status of emperor to that of attendant at another's court. [18] As for Bhīma, he has to cook and to fight with animals; when the queen sees signs of Draupadī's tenderness towards him, she gossips about the love-affair between her cook and her maid-servant. Mighty Arjuna has to wear ornaments and braided hair; he spends his time surrounded by girls. Sahadeva has to tend cattle, Nakula horses. Yudhiṣṭhira is responsible for the terrible misfortune into which they have all fallen. [19] Finally, Draupadī laments for herself: she is a princess, but now she has to do menial work for another; her hands are callused.

[20] Bhīma tries to calm Draupadī, urging her to be patient for the month-and-a-half that remains. She answers that it is her treatment at the hands of Kīcaka that has brought her to such a state, and insists that she will take poison if he is not killed.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[21] ‘Timid lady,’ said Bhīma, ‘I shall do as you say: today I shall slay

Kīcaka with his kinsmen! Make an assignation with him on the evening of this coming night, and cast off your sadness and grief, sweet-smiling Draupadī. The Matsya king has had a dance-hall constructed; girls dance there by day, but at night they go to their homes. There is a bed there, timid one, strong and well-built: there I shall introduce him to his late ancestors! But make sure that no one sees you make your rendezvous with him, O fair one, and that he waits nearby!

Talking thus and shedding tears, the two of them somehow found heart to bear the remainder of that bitter night. The next morning, when night had passed, Kīcaka arose. He went straight to the royal palace and spoke to Draupadī: 'Before the king's eyes in the hall I threw you down and kicked you, and you got no help, for the stronger man overpowered you. He is named as king of the Matsyas, but that is merely words, for the true king of the Matsyas is his general, I myself! So accept me gladly, timid one; I shall be your slave. I shall give you at once a hundred gold coins, lady of fine hips, and I shall give you a hundred slave-girls, and a hundred male slaves besides, as well as a carriage drawn by she-mules. Timid one, let us unite!'

'Today you must accept one stipulation, Kīcaka,' said Draupadī. 'No one, friend or brother, must know that you are with me, for I am fearful that we may be discovered by my famed Gandharvas. Promise me this, and I am yours.'

'I shall do as you say, lady of fine hips,' replied Kīcaka; 'I shall go all alone to your dwelling to unite with you, so that those Gandharvas radiant as the sun will not discover you. I am crazed with love, lady of fine thighs!'

'The Matsya king has had a dance-hall constructed here,' said Draupadī; 'girls dance there by day, but at night they go to their homes. Go there in the dark: the Gandharvas do not know it, so there we shall escape blame, make no doubt!'

Thus Draupadī Kṛṣṇā spoke of this matter with Kīcaka; for her, O king, the next half of the day passed like a month. But Kīcaka went home utterly overwhelmed by joy, for the fool did not realize that she was his death in the form of a maid-servant. He was particularly fond of perfumes, ornaments and garlands, and so, besotted as he was, he made haste to adorn himself; and for him the time seemed to pass slowly as

he performed this task, thinking of nothing but the long-eyed woman. Even more good-looking now, he prepared to give up good looks for ever, like a lamp nearing extinction and starting to burn up its wick. Trustful, besotted Kīcaka did not notice the day passing by as he thought only of his tryst.

Now lovely Draupadī went to the kitchen and approached her husband Bhīma, the heir of Kuru. The lady of fair tresses told him, 'I have made an assignation with Kīcaka in the dance-hall, just as you said, afflicter of your enemies. He will come alone to the dance-hall when it is empty at night. Strong-armed hero, slay this Kīcaka! Lust has made the Sūta's son arrogant, son of Kuntī; go to the dance-hall, O Pāṇḍava, and take his life. In his arrogance he even looks down on the Gandharvas. You are the best of fighting men: take out the Sūta's son like an elephant tearing out a reed! Heir of Bharata, I am overwhelmed with misery, so wipe away my tears, and maintain your own and your family's honour, good sir!'

'Welcome, beautiful lady of fine hips,' answered Bhīma. 'What you tell me pleases me, for I do not want him to have any companion. I have the same pleasure in learning from you of your assignation with Kīcaka that I had when I killed Hidimba!¹ I swear to you by truth, by my brothers and by *dharma* that I shall slay Kīcaka, as Indra, lord of the gods, slew Vṛtra. Whether in private or in public, I shall crush Kīcaka, and if the Matsyas come to hear of it, I shall surely kill them too; then I shall kill Duryodhana and win back the earth! Let Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhīra continue to serve the Matsya king if he wishes!'

'My lord and hero,' said Draupadī, 'to keep your word to me you must slay Kīcaka in secret.' 'I shall do it just as you say, timid one!' replied Bhīma. 'Wicked Kīcaka desires an unattainable woman. Tonight, blameless lady, unseen in the dark, I shall crush his head like an elephant trampling a wood-apple!'

That night, Bhīma went first to the dance-hall and sat there concealed, waiting for Kīcaka as a hidden lion waits for a deer. As for Kīcaka, he adorned himself to his liking and approached at the appointed time, hoping for union with the Pāñcāla princess. He entered that hall, his

¹ See 1.139-42.

mind on his assignation. Once inside the building, which was huge and completely dark, the wicked man came upon Bhīma of incomparable might, who was waiting alone after arriving there earlier: the Sūta laid hands on his own death, who lay there on the bed blazing with fury at his assault on Draupadī. Drawing closer, the besotted Kīcaka spoke to him with a smile, his mind aswirl with excitement: 'I have conferred boundless wealth of many sorts upon you; I directed that it all be given you, and then came swiftly here. It is not without reason that the women of my house always praise me, saying, "No other man is as well dressed and handsome as you!"'

Bhīma answered him, 'My felicitations on your good looks and your self-esteem; however, you have never experienced any sensation such as this!' And with these words strong-armed Kunti's son, Bhīma of terrible valour, leapt up with a laugh and seized the vile man by his garlanded, perfumed hair. Finding himself laid hold of in this way, Kīcaka, mightiest of the mighty, used his strength to free his hair, and then swiftly seized Bhīma by the arms. Then the two lion-like heroes wrestled with one another like two mighty elephants fighting in spring for a female. Bhīma tripped slightly, for sheer rage had made him unsteady on his feet, whereupon mighty Kīcaka kneed him and hurled him to the ground.

Thrown to the ground by the powerful Kīcaka, Bhīma then swiftly leapt up again like a snake struck with a stick, and the two rivals, Sūta and Pāṇḍava, both strong men and both drunk with their strength, harried each other in the deserted hall at midnight. Then that fine building trembled over and over again, while the two men roared at each other in their mighty rage. Bhīma slapped Kīcaka on the chest with the flat of his hands, yet Kīcaka, blazing with fury, did not move even a step. But after enduring for a little while his enemy's onslaught, which none on earth could endure, the Sūta then began, despite himself, to fail, for he was overcome by Bhīma's might; and when mighty Bhīma saw that he was failing, he hugged him to his chest and shook him unconscious.

Then, exhaling deeply in his anger, wolf-belly Bhīma, the best of victors, once again seized him hard by the hair; catching hold of Kīcaka, mighty Bhīma roared aloud like a hungry tiger that has caught a great deer. He squeezed all his limbs, his hands, feet, head and neck, inside

his body, as Śiva, the bearer of the Pināka weapon, did to the sacrificial beast.¹ And when he had mangled him in every limb and reduced him to a ball of flesh, mighty Bhīma showed him to Kṛṣṇā. Pāṇḍu's son of great ardour said to Draupadī, 'Pāñcāla princess, come and see what I have done to this lover!' Then, his anger appeased by having killed Kīcaka in this way, he bade farewell to Draupadī Kṛṣṇā and quickly returned to the kitchen.

As for Draupadī, that best of women rejoiced at having secured Kīcaka's death. Freed from her distress, she now addressed the guards of the hall: 'Kīcaka lies here, slain by my Gandharva husbands for lusting after a married woman. Come and see!' When the guards of the dance-hall heard her words, they came swiftly in their thousands, bearing torches; and when they reached the building they saw Kīcaka lying slain on the ground, doused in blood. 'Where is his neck? Where are his feet? Where his hands and head?' they asked, and then they concluded that he had been killed by a Gandharva.

[22] At this point all Kīcaka's kinsmen arrived. When they saw him, they stood round him weeping; at the sight of Kīcaka with all his limbs mangled, like a turtle hauled on to dry land, the hair rose on their bodies and they were frightened, for Bhīma had crushed him as Indra crushes demons. They wished to perform the last rites for him, and so they began to carry him away; and then those assembled sons of Sūtas saw Draupadī Kṛṣṇā of flawless limbs standing nearby, leaning against a pillar. One of Kīcaka's folk among the assembled Sūtas said to them, 'Let us kill this adulteress at once, for Kīcaka was killed on her account! Better still, instead of killing her here, let us burn her together with her lover – we should show the Sūta's son every kindness, even after death!'

Then they addressed Virāta: 'Kīcaka was killed on her account, and she should be burnt with him today: please permit it!' And the king, remembering the Sūtas' might, was happy to allow the maid-servant to be burnt with the son of a Sūta, lord of the peoples. So Kīcaka's folk returned to lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇā, who was swooning with terror, and seized

¹ When Śiva disrupts the sacrifice of Dakṣa, from which he had been excluded, the sacrifice itself flees from him in the form of a deer, but he destroys it (12.274) and, in a passage considered secondary by the editor, beheads it (12, App. I, 28.111).

10 her forcibly. Then they all lifted the slender-waisted lady on to the bier, bound her fast, and bore her away towards the burning-ground.

As blameless Kṛṣṇā was carried off by those Sūtas' sons, O king, she cried out for the protection of her husbands, for she had husbands to protect her. 'Jaya, Jayanta, Vijaya, Jayatsena and Jayadbala, hear my words: the sons of Sūtas are taking me! The terrible twang of the bowstring against your palms, sounding like the roar of a thunderbolt, has been heard in great battles, spirited and famed Gandharvas, and so has the mighty din of your chariots. Hear my words: the sons of Sūtas are taking me!'

15 As soon as Bhīma heard Kṛṣṇā's pitiful words, he leapt from his bed without pause for thought and answered her: 'Maidservant, I hear the words you speak, so you need not fear the Sūtas' sons, timid one!' Then with these words strong-armed Bhīma swelled up in his eagerness to kill; flexing his limbs and donning different clothes, he set forth, leaping the wall rather than using the gate. Swiftly he uprooted a tree from the rampart, and headed towards the burning-ground where Kīcaka's folk had gone. Brandishing this sixty-foot tree, trunk, branches and all, 20 mighty Bhīma rushed at the Sūtas like staff-wielding Death; so swiftly did his thighs carry him that banyans, *āsvathas* and *kimśuka* trees fell to the earth and lay in heaps.

When the Sūtas saw this Gandharva come at them like a raging lion, they were all terrified; they trembled in their misery and fear. Kīcaka's folk saw a Gandharva approaching like Death as they prepared to burn the body of their eldest brother, and, trembling with misery and fear, they said to one another, 'A mighty Gandharva is coming: he is furious, and is brandishing a tree! Quickly release the maidservant, for great danger is upon us!' Gazing at the tree that Bhīma had torn from the ground they let go of Draupadī on the spot and ran headlong for the city.

25 Bhīma saw them running away, and, like Indra the god of the thunderbolt attacking the demons, he dispatched a hundred and five of them to the realm of Yama. Then he released Draupadī Kṛṣṇā, lord of the peoples, and comforted her; and the strong-armed hero, the unconquerable wolf-belly, addressed the Pāñcāla princess as she stood there downcast, her eyes filled with tears: 'This, timid one, is how they

are slain who wrong your innocent self! Go forth to the city, Kṛṣṇā: you are no longer in danger. I shall return to Virāta's kitchen by another route.'

Thus a hundred and five lay dead there, heir of Bharata, like a great forest that has been felled, its trees lying tumbled in disorder. A hundred and five of Kīcaka's folk were slain, O king, as was the general himself before: altogether a hundred and six Sūtas. When the men and women of the city came and beheld this great marvel, heir of Bharata, they were utterly astounded and could not speak a word.

[23] When the people saw those Sūtas lying slain, they went and informed the king: 'Lord, the Gandharvas have killed more than a hundred sons of Sūtas! They lie on the ground, looking as if the huge peak of a mountain had been split apart and scattered by a thunderbolt. That maid-servant has also been freed, and she is returning to your house. Your whole city is in danger, king, for the maid-servant is so lovely and the Gandharvas so mighty, and men's favourite indulgence is in sex, make no doubt! You must swiftly establish a strategy to prevent this city of yours from meeting with destruction in the shape of a maid-servant, O king.'

When Virāta the general heard their words, he gave orders for the last rites to be performed for the Sūtas: 'Let all Kīcaka's folk be quickly cremated on a single well-blazing pyre, with plenty of gems and incense!' And in his alarm the king told Queen Sudeṣṇā, 'When your maid-servant gets here, say to her on my authority, "Maid-servant, go! Go wherever you will, good lady of fine hips, for the king fears defeat at the hands of your Gandharvas!" I dare not tell her this myself, since she is under the Gandharvas' protection; however, women are blameless, and so I call on you to speak to her.'

Draupadī Kṛṣṇā had been freed from her danger and released by Bhīma, who had wiped out those sons of Sūtas; now the spirited girl washed herself and her garments with water and then set out for the city, like a doe that has been terrified by a tiger. When men saw her, O king, they ran headlong in every direction, and some of them covered their eyes in their terror of the Gandharvas.

Then the Pāñcāla princess saw Bhīma standing at the kitchen door, O king, looking like a mighty elephant in rut. Full of wonder, but

speaking softly and using signs, she said to him, 'Honour to the Gandharva king who set me free!' Bhīma answered, 'When men here on earth owe allegiance to a woman, to hear her command releases them from their debt!'

Next she saw wealth-winner Arjuna in the dance-hall, where the strong-armed hero was teaching the king's daughters dancing. The girls left the hall with Arjuna and watched while Draupadī Krṣṇā drew close, a woman innocent but wronged. 'What a blessing that you were set free, maidservant,' they said; 'what a blessing that you have returned, and that those Sūtas lie slain who wronged your innocent self!'

20 'How were you set free, maidservant,' asked Br̥hannadā, 'and how were those wicked men slain? I want to hear it all: tell me just as it happened!'

But the maidservant replied, 'Br̥hannadā, what concern do you have with a maidservant? You spend all your days in comfort in the girls' quarters, fair one, and know none of the distress that a maidservant experiences; so why do you laughingly question me in my distress?'

'Fair child,' answered Br̥hannadā, 'Br̥hannadā too suffers extreme distress in this subhuman form of hers; you do not understand her.'

25 But Draupadī took the girls with her, entered the royal palace, and fearlessly approached Sudesñā. The princess addressed her on Virāta's authority: 'Maidservant, go quickly wherever you wish to go! The king, good lady, fears defeat at the hands of your Gandharvas, and you yourself are young and lovely, your beauty incomparable on earth.'

'Let the king grant me just thirteen days' grace, fair queen,' replied Draupadī; 'this will satisfy those Gandharvas, make no doubt, and they will then take me away from here and do whatever you wish. The king and his kinsmen will certainly benefit from this.'

THE CATTLE RAID

[24] *The people of Matsya are delighted at the death of the hated Kīcaka clan. Meanwhile, however, Duryodhana's spies, who have been searching for the Pāñdavas, return to Hastinapura and report that they can find no trace of them in the forest. They also report the death of Kīcaka.*

[25] Duryodhana reflects, and instructs his spies to try again. But Karṇa intervenes, urging him to send cleverer men. Duḥśasana agrees, though he suspects that the Pāñdavas are already dead. [26] Drona warns that such excellent men as the Pāñdavas, all of them so devoted to each other, are most unlikely to have met their end. A thorough search should be undertaken. [27] Bhīṣma supports Drona in maintaining that the Pāñdavas will still be alive, and adds that intelligence should be deployed to trace them. The land where Yudhiṣṭhira is living will be prosperous and its people will be virtuous and contented. [28] Kṛpa agrees with Bhīṣma's views on tracing the Pāñdavas. In the meantime, Duryodhana's best policy will be to build up his resources and his army, and to strengthen his alliances, in readiness for the day when they return from their exile.

[29] Now Suśarman, king of Trigarta and an old enemy of Matsya, observes that the death of Kīcaka leaves Virāta vulnerable, and proposes to launch an attack on his kingdom. Karṇa strongly supports this suggestion, arguing that the Pāñdavas are too weak to pose any threat. Duryodhana approves the plan, and Suśarman sets out for a cattle raid against Matsya.

[30] At the end of the Pāñdavas' thirteenth year of exile, King Virāta receives news from a cowherd that Suśarman of Trigarta has attacked and is driving off hundreds of thousands of cattle. At once he rides out at the head of a great army, accompanied by his brothers and his son Śārikha; he also gives orders for Karika, Ballava, Tantipāla and Granthika to be equipped to join his force.

[31] Virāta's army catches up with that of Suśarman, and a fierce battle begins. Virāta cuts his way through the Trigarta troops until he reaches Suśarman's chariot, and the two kings shower each other with arrows until night falls.

[32] Darkness brings the battle to a halt, but soon the moon rises and fighting resumes. Suśarman and his brother, supported by a chariot force, succeed in taking Virāta prisoner, and the Matsya army begins to flee. Yudhiṣṭhira tells Bhīma to rescue him, but to avoid giving away his identity by using his superhuman strength. All four Pāñdavas now battle mightily against the men of Trigarta, and Bhīma rescues Virāta and captures Suśarman, whose army is routed. They return the cattle and other treasures to Virāta; he rewards them and proposes to make Yudhiṣṭhira king, but Yudhiṣṭhira merely tells him to have his victory proclaimed in the city.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[33] While the Matsya king made for Trigarta in hopes of regaining

his livestock, Duryodhana with his ministers attacked the kingdom of Virāṭa. Bhīṣma, Drona, Karna, Kṛpa the master of weaponry, Drona's son Aśvathāman, Subala's son Śakuni, the lord Duḥsāsana, Vivīṁśati, Vikarṇa, heroic Citrasena, Durmukha, Duḥsaha, and the other mighty chariot-fighters: all these attacked King Virāṭa's kingdom of Matsya. Swiftly they put his cattle-stations to flight and took the cattle by force: the Kurus rounded up sixty thousand cows with a great mass of chariots, and drove them off.

As the cowherds in the cattle-stations were slain by the mighty chariot-fighters in that terrible conflict, they let out a loud cry; but their overseer hastily mounted a chariot in his fear, and drove straight for the city, wailing in his affliction. Entering the city of the king, he rode to the royal palace, leapt down from his chariot, and went in to announce the news. There he saw the Matsya king's proud son, Bhūmīmjaya by name,¹ and he told him all about the plundering of the kingdom's livestock. 'The Kurus are driving off sixty thousand cows! Arise, win back the cattle, the wealth through which the kingdom prospers! Prince, if you wish to do good, set out swiftly yourself, for the Matsya king has left you here in charge of the empty city. The lord of men boasts about you in the midst of the assembly: "My son is like me, brave and the heir to a great line; my son is ever the hero, a warrior skilled with weapons of every sort!" Let the prince of men's words come true indeed: win back the cattle, best of cattle-owners, and turn back the Kurus! Burn their forces with the terrible fiery energy of your arrows! Destroy the enemy troops with the well-planed, gold-shafted arrows that fly from your bow, as the lord of an elephant herd would destroy an enemy herd! In the midst of your enemies, play on the loud-voiced lute that is your bow, with its fastening-knots for tuning-cords, its bowstring for strings, its own staff for neck, and its arrows for notes. Have your silver-white horses yoked to your chariot, and your standard of a golden lion raised, lord; let the gold-shafted, bright-tipped arrows which you shoot so dextrously obscure the sun and cut short the lives of kings! Conquer all the Kurus in battle, as Indra conquered the demons with his thunderbolt; return to this city

¹ Bhūmīmjaya ('Conqueror of the earth') is also known as Uttara.

after winning great renown! You, as the lord of Matsya's son, are the ultimate protector of the kingdom, so let all who live within the realm find protection in you today!'

When these courage-inspiring words were addressed to Prince Uttara in the midst of his womenfolk, he gave his answer, boasting before the people of the women's quarters: [34] 'Today, strong Bowman that I am, I would follow the trail of the cows, if only I had some charioteer who was skilled with horses! What I lack is a man to drive me: quickly find someone suitable to be my charioteer when I set forth! My own charioteer was finally killed in a great battle that lasted for twenty-eight days, if not a month. But if I could just get another man with skill in controlling the horses, I would set out at speed today with my mighty standard raised; I would force my way through the ranks of my enemies with all their elephants, horses and chariots, defeat the Kurus, overwhelming them with the prowess of my weapons, and fetch back the cows! Bringing terror to Duryodhana, Bhīṣma son of Śaṁtanu, Karna the Cutter, Kṛpa, Drona and his son Aśvathāman, and all the other mighty bowmen gathered there, just as Indra terrified the demons in battle with his thunderbolt, I would fetch back the cows in a trice! It is because the Kurus found the country empty that they have been able to make off with our cattle – what could I do when I was not there? But if all those Kurus see my heroism today, they will wonder if they have come under attack from Arjuna son of Kuntī himself!'

Now as he spoke these words again and again amidst his womenfolk, the Pāñcāla princess could not bear his referring to Arjuna Bībhatsu. The poor woman bashfully stepped out towards him from amongst the women and softly said, 'That most handsome youth with the air of a mighty elephant, the one known as Brhannādā, used to be Arjuna's charioteer. He was that noble man's pupil with the bow, and in no way his inferior: I saw him before, brave sir, when I went to join the Pāñdavas. When the Fire god burned down the great Khāṇḍava forest,¹ he was in charge of Arjuna's fine horses; he was the charioteer when Kuntī's son defeated all creatures throughout Khāṇḍavaprastha. There is no driver to match him! Make no doubt, brave sir, he will obey the

¹ See 1.214 ff.

command of your younger sister here, the princess of fine hips; and if he were your charioteer you would certainly return with the cows after defeating all the Kurus!'

Hearing the maidservant speak thus to him, he in turn addressed his sister: 'Go, lady of flawless limbs, and fetch this Br̥hannadā!' And at her brother's command she hastened to the dance-hall where that strong-armed son of Pāṇḍu was staying under cover of his disguise.

[35] When Br̥hannadā saw his friend the wide-eyed princess, O king, he laughed and asked her why she had come. She approached the bull-like hero and addressed him affectionately in the midst of her companions: 'Br̥hannadā, the cows of this realm are being driven off by the Kurus, and my brother is to set forth, bow in hand, to defeat them. His charioteer was slain in battle not long ago, and there is no 5 Sūta to match that man who might act as his charioteer. However, my maidservant spoke to him of your skill with horses, Br̥hannadā, as he was striving to find a charioteer. So, Br̥hannadā, you must drive for my brother, and drive well, before our cows are carried off further by the Kurus! If you will not carry out my wishes today, though I have asked you affectionately, I shall give up my life!'

Hearing his friend of the fine hips speak so, Arjuna, afflicter of his enemies, went into the presence of the prince of boundless power, treading rapidly like an elephant in rut, while the wide-eyed young 10 princess followed him like a she-elephant. The prince saw him while he was still far distant, and said, 'With you as charioteer, Kuntī's son Arjuna the wealth-winner satiated the Fire god in the Khāṇḍava forest and conquered the whole earth: the maidservant told me all about you, for she knew the Pāṇḍavas. Take charge of my horses in just the same way, Br̥hannadā, as I battle with the Kurus to regain our cattle! I am told that you were once Arjuna's favourite charioteer, and that it was with your help that the bull-like Pāṇḍava conquered the earth!'

To these words of the prince, Br̥hannadā replied, 'What power do 15 I have to drive a chariot in the thick of battle? Singing, dancing, or playing musical instruments of various sorts: that I will do, good sir, but how am I to drive a chariot?'

'Br̥hannadā,' said Uttara, 'be you singer or dancer, quickly mount my chariot and take charge of my fine horses!'

Then, foe-tamer, in the presence of Princess Uttara,¹ Pāṇḍu's son began in fun to put on a great act, though really he knew everything he was doing: he tried to put on his armour by tossing it into the air, and the wide-eyed girls burst out laughing when they saw him. But when Prince Uttara saw Br̥hannadā acting so foolishly, he personally tied the costly armour on to him; he himself also wore splendid armour that shone like the sun. Raising his standard of a lion, he commanded Br̥hannadā to drive his chariot; and then, carrying costly bows and many fine arrows, that hero set forth with Br̥hannadā as his charioteer. 20

Now Uttara and the girls who were her friends said, 'Br̥hannadā, once you have defeated in battle the Kurus under Bhīṣma and Drona, bring us some lovely clothes for our dolls – delicate and beautiful ones of every kind!'

Kuntī's son, the son of Pāṇḍu, laughed to hear all the girls speak so, but his reply sounded like thunder or drums: 'If Uttara here defeats the mighty chariot-fighters in battle, I shall fetch you beautiful, heavenly clothes!' Then with these words brave Arjuna Bībhatsu urged on the horses forward towards the many standards and banners of the Kurus. 25

[36] Virāṭa's son Bhūmīmaya Uttara set out from the capital. 'Drive on,' he told his charioteer, 'to where those Kurus are! Once I have defeated the assembled Kurus who long for victory, and taken back their cows, I shall swiftly return to my own city.' So Pāṇḍu's son urged on the excellent horses; and, urged on by that tiger-like hero, those horses with their gold trappings seemed to fly like wind through the air.

Wealth-winner Arjuna and the son of the Matsya king had not gone far when the two enemy-slayers saw the mighty Kuru force. They passed near a burning-ground, and then they caught up with the Kurus. Their army was huge, and roared like the ocean; it seemed like a densely wooded forest moving slowly through space, and as it moved, it raised a dust from the earth that robbed creatures of their sight and reached as far as the sky, truest of men. When he saw that great force with all its elephants, horses and chariots, overseen by Karṇa, Duryodhana, Kṛpa, Bhīṣma son of Śaṅtanu, and wise Drona the mighty Bowman, together with his son Aśvatthāman, Virāṭa's son felt the hair rise on his body. 5

¹ Uttara's sister.

and in terror he said to Kuntī's son, 'I dare not fight against the Kurus! See, my hair stands on end! I cannot do battle with this boundless Kuru army, so fierce and full of so many heroes; even the gods would find it 10 invincible! I have no hope of penetrating the army of the Bhāratas with its fearful bows, its chariots, elephants and horses, its footsoldiers and its standards. For no sooner do I see my enemies on the battlefield than my soul seems to quake within me – there are Drona, Bhīṣma, Kṛpa, Karṇa, Vivīṁśati, Aśvatthāman, Vikarṇa, Somadatta and Bāhlika, and there too is brave King Duryodhana, best of chariot-fighters. All are splendid, mighty bowmen, expert in warfare. No sooner do I see these Kurus, warriors arrayed for war, than my hair stands on end and despair seizes me!'

Before the eyes of the bold and cunning Arjuna, the cowardly and 15 stupid prince continued his foolish lament. 'My father has set out for Trigarta, leaving me behind in an empty city: he has taken the whole army with him, and I have no troops here. I am all alone, a mere boy and untrained; I cannot fight against enemies who are numerous and expert in arms. Turn back, Br̥hannadā!'

Arjuna said, 'You seem cast down with fear, and a reason for your foes to rejoice; and yet thus far your enemies have done nothing on the field of battle! It was you yourself who said, "Carry me towards the Kauravas!" – so I shall take you to where their standards are most dense. Strong-armed hero, I shall take you into the midst of the Kurus, whose bows are strung to fight for the earth itself, like vultures fighting for flesh! 20 After vowing manly deeds before men and women alike, after setting forth still boasting, why do you now not wish to fight? If you go home without winning back those cows, O hero, men and women together will laugh at you. As for me, I was praised by the maid-servant for my skill in this business of driving, so I cannot make for the city without first winning back the cows. What with the maid-servant's praise and your own command, how could I not fight all those Kurus? Stand firm!'

'Let the Kurus take most of the Matsyas' wealth, if they so wish,' 25 answered Uttara; 'and let women and men laugh at me!' And with these words the foolish prince, still decked with earrings, leapt in terror down from the chariot and ran headlong, abandoning his pride, his bow and his arrows.

Br̥hannadā said, 'Our forefathers did not consider it to be the Kṣatriya's dharma to flee like this. Better for you to die in battle than to flee in terror!' And Kuntī's son wealth-winner Arjuna too leapt down with these words from the splendid chariot, and ran after the running prince, trailing his long braid and his bright red garments behind him.

Some of the soldiers, not recognizing Arjuna, laughed to see him trailing a braid as he ran. But seeing how fast he was running, the Kurus began to say, 'Who can this be, disguised by his apparel like a fire concealed under ashes? There is something of the man about him, and something of the woman, and he bears a resemblance to Arjuna, though in eunuch's form. The head and neck are his, and so are those arms like iron bars; the tread is like his. This cannot be anyone but the wealth-winner! As the lord Indra is among the immortals, so is the wealth-winner among men: who but Arjuna in this world would come against us alone? A single son was left behind in Virāṭa's empty city, and it looks as if he has set forth, though through childishness rather than manliness. For surely that is Kuntī's son Arjuna going along under cover of disguise! Uttara must have made him his charioteer before setting out from the city, and now it seems that he is fleeing in fear at the sight of our standards, and the wealth-winner is clearly trying to catch him as he runs!' Thus all the Kurus mused separately amongst themselves when they saw Pāṇḍu's son in disguise, heir of Bharata, but they were 30 unable to reach any firm conclusion.

Wealth-winner Arjuna ran on after the fleeing Uttara, and after a hundred paces he quickly laid hold of him by the hair. Finding himself laid hold of by Arjuna, Virāṭa's son wailed much and wretchedly in his affliction: 'I shall give you a hundred pure gold coins, eight bright beryl gems set in gold, a chariot with a gold flagstaff yoked to excellent steeds, and ten rutting elephants: let me go, Br̥hannadā!'

But tiger-like Arjuna laughed at him as he wailed in this manner, almost out of his mind, and he brought him back to the chariot. Then Kuntī's son said to the boy, swooning as he was with terror, 'If, O tormentor of your enemies, you dare not fight your enemies, then come and take charge of the horses for me, and I will fight them! Protected by the might of my arms, drive forth against this terrible chariot-force! It is utterly unassailable, for it is overseen by mighty,

heroic chariot-fighters; but you should not fear, foremost of princes, for you are a Kṣatriya. I shall fight the Kurus, afflicter of your enemies, and win back your beasts! Be my driver, best of men, and penetrate this unassailable, invincible chariot-force; I shall fight the Kurus!

45 Arjuna Bībhatsu, who had never suffered defeat, spent some time encouraging Virāta's son Uttara with such words. Then Kunti's son, the best of fighting men, forced the reluctant prince, who was struggling in his terror, to mount the chariot.

[37] *The sight of Bṛhannadā forcing Uttara on to his chariot makes the Kauravas downcast, and Drona forecasts disaster; he is certain the charioteer is Arjuna. But Duryodhana is pleased: if Arjuna has been recognized, the Pāṇḍavas will have to undergo a further twelve years of exile.*

[38] Arjuna instructs Uttara to fetch the Pāṇḍavas' weapons from their hiding-place in the śamī tree. Uttara objects that there is a corpse in the tree, but Arjuna insists. When the weapons are unwrapped, Uttara is astonished at their excellence, and asks about each one. Arjuna tells him all about them. [39] Now Uttara wants to know where the Pāṇḍavas themselves are. Arjuna answers that he is Arjuna, and identifies the others also. To confirm the truth of this claim, Uttara asks Arjuna to list his ten names, and, when he does so, to explain the meaning of each one. Uttara is delighted to be in Arjuna's presence, and his fear leaves him. [40] He tells Arjuna that he will act as his charioteer, and Arjuna replies that he will do battle with the Kauravas and win back Virāta's cattle. Uttara asks how it is that Arjuna became a eunuch; Arjuna tells him that he has observed a vow of celibacy for a year at Yudhiṣṭhira's direction, but that he is not a eunuch. Uttara now makes ready to drive the chariot, and Arjuna casts off his disguise as Bṛhannadā.

[41] *The sound of Arjuna's conch and of his bow Gāṇḍīva leaves Uttara stunned. Drona too hears it and recognizes it; he perceives bad portents and urges the Kauravas to stand firm. [42] Duryodhana claims that the thirteenth year is not yet complete, and that the Pāṇḍavas will therefore have to return to the forest for a further twelve years. The Kauravas are there to fight against the army of Matsya in support of Trigarta, and that is what they should do; Drona is influenced by his affection for Arjuna. [43] Karna now boasts that he is Arjuna's equal, and will overcome him in battle. [44] Kṛpa counsels caution. Arjuna has accomplished many great feats; Karna, who can claim no such achievements, is*

acting rashly. The Kauravas are in danger from Arjuna and should join forces against him. [45] Aśvatthāman too chides Karna for his boasting. Arjuna will not forgive the wrongs done to the Pāṇḍavas, and no one can survive his fury; it is foolish to enter into a fight with him.

[46] Bhīṣma defends Karna: he is obeying the Kṣatriya duty to fight, and Bhīṣma believes that fighting is the right course of action. At Bhīṣma's request, Drona pardons Duryodhana and Karna for speaking against him; then he asks Bhīṣma to adjudicate on whether the Pāṇḍavas have completed the allotted period of their exile. [47] Bhīṣma calculates that the term of exile is indeed complete. The Pāṇḍavas will certainly not give up what is rightfully theirs, so the Kauravas should prepare for war. Duryodhana announces that he will not restore the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom to them. Bhīṣma now orders the disposition of the Kaurava forces: a quarter are to hold the city, a quarter to drive off the cattle, and the remainder to face Arjuna.

[48] Arjuna approaches rapidly; Drona recognizes him. Arjuna orders Uttara to drive to where Duryodhana is; Drona proposes attacking him from the rear. Arjuna scatters the enemy with his arrows and turns the cattle with the sound of his conch and his chariot.

[49] Next, Arjuna pushes forward towards Duryodhana. The Kauravas attack him, but he breaks through them and instructs Uttara to drive him to where Karna is. Vikarna attempts to defend Karna, but Arjuna forces him to flee, and then kills numbers of Kaurava warriors including Karna's brother Saṃgrāmajit. Karna attacks Arjuna, but he cannot withstand him; he too flees.

[50] Uttara asks Arjuna which of the Kaurava warriors he wishes to confront next; Arjuna points out in turn Kṛpa, Drona, Aśvatthāman, Duryodhana, Karna and Bhīṣma. Uttara drives him to Kṛpa. [51] At this point Indra and the other gods arrive; they have come to watch Arjuna do battle with his celestial weapons.

[52] Arjuna and Kṛpa shower arrows upon each other. Arjuna's arrows make Kṛpa's horses rear, but he allows Kṛpa to recover his balance before severing his bow and cutting off his armour with further arrows. Kṛpa takes up bow after bow, but Arjuna destroys them all; then he kills Kṛpa's horses and his charioteer. Other Kaurava warriors attack Arjuna to support Kṛpa, but Arjuna holds them off; they carry Kṛpa away to safety.

[53] Arjuna now tells Uttara to drive him to Drona, and Uttara does so. Arjuna greets Drona and announces that, since the Pāṇḍavas' term of exile

is completed, they have come to avenge themselves on the Kauravas; however, he will not strike at Drona till Drona has struck at him. Drona responds by showering Arjuna with arrows, and the two begin a mighty combat, each shooting huge numbers of arrows at the other, and each countering the other's arrows and celestial weapons. Drona is unable to overcome Arjuna, and his son Aśvatthāman enters the fray to give him a chance to retreat.

[54] Aśvatthāman is overwhelmed by Arjuna's arrows, but he succeeds in severing his bowstring, earning the applause of the watching gods. Arjuna restrains, and a fierce combat begins; however, in time Aśvatthāman runs out of arrows, while Arjuna continues to shoot shafts from his inexhaustible arrow-cases. At this point Karṇa joins in the battle, and Arjuna turns his attention to him, while Aśvatthāman's allies bring him fresh supplies of arrows.

[55] Arjuna challenges Karṇa to make good his boasts, and Karṇa disdainfully and boastfully accepts the challenge. Arjuna sneers at Karṇa for having fled after his brother's death; then the battle between the two begins. Both fight fiercely, but in the end Arjuna kills Karṇa's horses and renders him briefly unconscious. Overcome by pain, he leaves the battlefield while Arjuna taunts him.

[56] Arjuna instructs Uttara to drive him to Bhīṣma, whom he swears to overcome. His attack is countered by Duḥśāsana, Vikarṇa, Duḥsaha and Vivīṁśati; Duḥśāsana wounds both Arjuna and Uttara, but Arjuna overcomes him and puts him to flight. Vikarṇa takes up the fight, but is immediately pierced by Arjuna's arrows and falls from his chariot. Duḥsaha and Vivīṁśati attack Arjuna as they try to rescue Vikarṇa, but Arjuna wounds them both and kills their horses; they are carried away to safety by other warriors.

[57] Now all the Kauravas combine together to attack Arjuna, but he slays them in such numbers that a river of blood flows on the battlefield. [58] Duryodhana, Karṇa, Duḥśāsana, Vivīṁśati, Drona, Aśvatthāman and Kṛpa shower arrows upon Arjuna, but he is unscathed, and shoots arrows in such numbers that his enemies all flee.

[59] Bhīṣma himself now attacks Arjuna, and there is a fierce battle between them, watched with amazed admiration by the onlookers. First one gains the upper hand, then the other. Citrasena and Indra praise the combatants, and Indra showers them with flowers. Finally Arjuna's arrows reduce Bhīṣma to unconsciousness, and his charioteer bears him away.

[60] Duryodhana returns to the attack and pierces Arjuna in the forehead with an arrow. He is joined by Vikarṇa riding an elephant, but Arjuna shoots

the beast dead and Vikarṇa has to take refuge on Vivīṁśati's chariot. Next Arjuna wounds Duryodhana, who takes flight. Arjuna taunts him for quitting the battle. [61] Arjuna's words goad Duryodhana into returning to the fray: he is joined by Karṇa, Bhīṣma, Drona, Kṛpa, Vivīṁśati and Duḥśāsana. Arjuna is surrounded, but he makes use of the Weapon of Bewilderment; the sound of his bow Gāndīva terrifies his enemies, and the blast of his conch renders them unconscious. On Arjuna's instruction, Uttara collects up the clothes of all of them except for Bhīṣma. Bhīṣma shoots once more, but Arjuna kills his horses and charioteer, and pierces him with ten arrows before driving away. When Duryodhana regains consciousness he accuses Bhīṣma of letting Arjuna escape, but in reply Bhīṣma mocks him, and tells him to return home and let Arjuna keep the cattle he has won. Arjuna drives up: he bows to Bhīṣma and Drona and salutes Aśvatthāman and Kṛpa with arrows,¹ but he breaks Duryodhana's crown. Then with a blast of his conch he leaves, telling Uttara to return to his city.

[62] Now Arjuna rounds up Virāta's herds. When Kaurava soldiers emerge from the forest and ask for his instructions, he tells them to go in peace. Uttara is to wait until all the cattle have been collected together and the horses watered and rested, and is then to have his victory proclaimed in the city.

THE WEDDING

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[63] Meanwhile, Virāta the general had won back his cattle. Accompanied by the other four Pāṇḍavas, he entered the city in joy: having defeated the Trigartas in battle and regained all of his cows, the great king now shone in glory together with Kuntī's sons. As the hero sat on his throne, to the great happiness of his friends, all the counsellors and Brahmins approached him. The Matsya king, commander of his army, received the homage of counsellors and Brahmins; then he returned their greetings and gave them leave to depart.

Now Virāta the general, the king of the Matsyas, asked about Uttara:

¹ According to the commentator Nīlakanṭha, the arrows would be dropped at the feet of the person saluted – presumably a kind of warrior's greeting.

'Where has he gone?' he said. The women and girls of his household, and the other residents of the women's quarters, happily answered him, 'The Kurus plundered our cattle; but Bhūmīmījaya was enraged, and with the greatest boldness he set forth all alone with Brhannadā to defeat the six great chariot-fighters who had attacked us: Drona, Bhīṣma son of Śaṅtanu, Kṛpa, Karṇa, Duryodhana, and Drona's son Aśvatthāman.'

King Virāta was deeply grieved to hear that his son had set out, longing to do battle, with a single chariot and with Brhannadā for his 10 charioteer. He announced to all his chief ministers, 'We can be sure that those Kurus and other kings will never remain near here once they learn that the Trigartas have been defeated. So let those of my troops who were not injured by the Trigartas set out with a mighty force to rescue Uttara!' For his son's sake he quickly dispatched horses and elephants and chariots, together with many brave footsoldiers, all bearing wonderful weapons and ornaments. And the king of the Matsyas, Virāta the general, hastened to command his fourfold army: 'Swiftly discover whether the prince is alive or not! I believe that the man who is accompanied by a eunuch as his charioteer will not survive.'

15 Yudhiṣṭhira lord of *dharma* laughed, and told Virāta who was suffering great grief over the Kurus, 'Lord of men, if Brhannadā is his charioteer, no enemy will be able to plunder your cows today! For, served by that charioteer, your son will be able to conquer in battle all the kings of the earth, the Kurus too, and even the gods, demons, Yaksas and serpents!'

But now swift-travelling messengers dispatched by Uttara reached the city of Virāta to declare his victory. Then the king's minister announced to him this great triumph and the defeat of the Kurus, and told him that Uttara was on his way: 'All the cows have been won back, and the Kurus are defeated; and, O afflicter of your enemies, Uttara and his charioteer are safe!'

20 'I felicitate you on the winning back of your cows,' said Yudhiṣṭhira in his disguise as Kaṅka, 'and on the defeat of the Kurus; and I felicitate you on the news that your son is alive, bull-like prince! But I do not think it at all remarkable that your son has conquered the Kurus: victory is assured for the man who has Brhannadā for his charioteer.'

When King Virāta heard of the triumph of Prince Uttara of boundless power, he felt the hair rise on his body. He rewarded the messengers with

25 fine garments, and then urged his ministers, 'Let the royal highways be decked with banners, and all the deities be worshipped with offerings of flowers! Let princes, warrior chiefs, well-adorned courtesans and musicians of every kind set forth to greet my son! Let a player of bells and cymbals make haste to mount a rutting elephant and proclaim my victory at every crossroads! Let Princess Uttara too deck herself in alluring clothes and ornaments, and set out with many young girls to greet Brhannadā!'

Then on hearing the king's command, men bearing auspicious emblems as well as kettledrums, trumpets and conches, and lovely women dressed in the finest clothes, along with Sūta and Māgadha bards with cymbals, trumpets and other musical instruments, all set forth from the city of mighty Virāta to greet his son of infinite strength. And after sending out his army, and the girls, and well-adorned courtesans, the most wise Matsya king said in excitement, 'Maidservant, fetch the dice! Let the game proceed, Kaṅka!'

When he said this, Pāṇḍu's son looked at him and answered, 'A 30 gambler should not gamble when he is excited, or so I have heard: I dare not gamble today with you when you are so full of happiness. However, I wish to do what will please you; let it proceed if you think fit.'

Virāta said, 'Women, cows, gold and whatever other wealth I own: you cannot keep any of it back for me even if I do not gamble!'

35 'Prince of kings, bestower of honour,' replied Kaṅka, 'why should you gamble? There are many evils in gambling, and so one should avoid it. You must have seen or heard of Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhira: he had a very great and wealthy kingdom, and godlike brothers, and he gambled them all away! This is why I do not approve of gambling. However, if you think fit, O king, and if it pleases you, then let the two of us gamble.'

Now as the dicing began, the Matsya said to Pāṇḍu's son, 'Just see how such mighty Kurus were defeated by my son!' And then Yudhiṣṭhira lord of *dharma* answered the Matsya king, 'How can the man who has Brhannadā for his charioteer fail to conquer?'

At these words Virāta said to the Pāṇḍava, 'You call yourself a Brahmin, and yet you praise a eunuch equally with my son! You have

no idea of what is proper to say and what improper, and you treat me with disrespect! Why should he not defeat all the Kurus under Bhīṣma and Drona? However, for friendship's sake, Brahmin, I pardon you this offence; but you should not speak so again if you wish to live.'

'Prince of kings,' replied Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'Where Drona, Bhīṣma, Drona's son Aśvatthāman, Karṇa the Cutter, Kṛpa and Duryodhana are gathered together along with other mighty chariot-fighters, there Indra himself in person, surrounded by the hosts of the Maruts, could battle against them all; but otherwise who could do so but Brhannadā?'

'Repeatedly I forbade you,' said Virāta, 'and yet you do not restrain your tongue. Where no one has restraint, no one practises *dharma*!' Then the furious king struck Yudhiṣṭhīra hard in the face with a die, angrily rebuking him: 'Do not speak so!'

45 The violence of the blow drew blood from his nose; Kuntī's son caught it in his hands before it could reach the ground, and then the righteous man looked towards Draupadī, who was standing to one side. The blameless lady understood his intent and, obedient to her husband's unspoken thought, filled a gold vessel with water and caught in it the blood that flowed from Pāṇḍu's son.

Now Uttara slowly approached the city, full of joy, showered with fine perfumes and many and various garlands; town and country men were honouring him, and so were their women. Reaching the palace gate, he 50 had his arrival announced to his father. The doorkeeper entered, and at once addressed Virāta: 'Your son Uttara, accompanied by Brhannadā, stands at the gate!' The Matsya king joyfully told his chamberlain, 'Bring them both in at once, for I long to see them!' But Yudhiṣṭhīra, the king of the Kurus, whispered into the chamberlain's ear, 'Let Uttara enter alone – do not bring Brhannadā in! Strong-armed hero, he has sworn a vow that if anyone inflicts a wound on my body or causes my blood to flow except in battle, that man shall surely not live. The moment that he saw me bloodied, fury would get the better of him and he would slay Virāta on the spot, together with his ministers, troops and steeds!'

[64] Then the king's eldest son, Bhūmīmṛjaya Uttara, entered. He paid his respects at his father's feet, and then he saw Yudhiṣṭhīra the sinless lord of *dharma*, sitting bloodstained and distracted by himself on

the ground, attended by the maidservant. Uttara hastily asked his father, 'Who struck this man, O king? Who did this wicked deed?'

'I struck this false Brahmin,' answered Virāta, 'and it is less than he deserved for praising the eunuch when I was praising your heroism!'

'O king,' said Uttara, 'you have done wrong. Make haste to conciliate him, or his terrible Brahmin venom will destroy you utterly!'

Hearing his son's words, Virāta, the enricher of his kingdom, asked pardon of Kuntī's son, who was like a fire concealed under ashes. But as the king asked him for pardon, Pāṇḍu's son replied, 'I pardoned this long ago, O king, and I harbour no anger. Great king, if this blood from my nose had fallen on the ground, you and your kingdom would have perished, make no doubt! But I do not blame you for striking someone blameless, O king, for harshness quickly takes possession of the powerful.'

Once the bleeding stopped, Brhannadā entered. He greeted both Virāta and Kaṅka, and drew close. But now that he had been pardoned by the king of the Kurus, the Matsya king began to praise Uttara, freshly returned from battle, within the hearing of the ambidextrous Arjuna. 'Son of the Kekaya princess,' he said, 'in you I have an heir! No other son of mine has ever matched you, or ever will. How was your encounter with Karṇa, my son, who misses not one mark in a thousand when in action? How was your encounter with Bhīṣma, my son, who is without equal in the whole world of men, immovable as the ocean, unbearable as doomsday fire? How was your encounter with the Brahmin Drona, my son, the Teacher of the Vṛṣṇi heroes and the Pāṇḍavas, and of all Kṣatriyas, the best of all those who bear arms? How was your encounter with the man known as Aśvatthāman, the Teacher's son, another hero among bearers of arms? How was your encounter with Kṛpa, my son, the sight of whom in battle makes men despair like ruined merchants? How was your encounter with Duryodhana, my son, the prince who could penetrate a mountain with his powerful arrows?'

Uttara answered, 'It was not I who won back the cows, it was not I who defeated the enemy; that deed was done entirely by a certain son of a god. For I was fleeing in terror when the god's son stopped me, and took up position in the interior of my chariot, a young man and yet Indra-like. It was he who won back the cows, it was he who