

The people prospered, for they were given to generosity, religious practice and virtue, promoting sacrifices and observances, and living on terms of affection with each other. They were free from pride and anger, and from greed, and their prosperity was shared, for *dharma* held sway. The teeming city seemed then like a mighty ocean, with its clouds like gateways, arches and turrets, and its palaces, massed in hundreds like those of the city of great Indra himself. People passed their time pleasantly by rivers and in woods, by ponds and pools and on mountain peaks, and in the lovely forests. The southern Kurus then rivalled their northern kin,<sup>1</sup> associating with Siddhas, seers and Cāraṇas; no one was poor, no women were widows. While Bhīṣma justly ruled over all of that fine kingdom, O king, the Kurus dug many wells and ponds, and built many rest-houses and halls; they built, too, many dwellings for the Brahmins. The land was beautiful to see with all its hundreds of sacred columns, and it prospered, absorbing other realms within itself, while Bhīṣma kept the wheel of *dharma* rolling forward throughout the kingdom.

While the noble young princes performed their duties, the people of town and country held permanent festival, and in the homes of leading Kurus and other citizens, lord of men, cries of 'Take!' and 'Eat!' were always to be heard. From birth onward, Bhīṣma looked after Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and sagacious Vidura as though they were his own sons. They passed through their consecration ceremonies, and they undertook religious observance and study; and so, skilled now at work and play, they came to manhood. They had mastered archery, horsemanship, fighting with clubs, and fighting with sword and shield, as well as elephant skills and governance; they studied history and ancient tales, and other disciplines too, O lord, and they understood the teachings of the Vedas with their branches. In valour with the bow, Pāṇḍu outstripped all men, while the strength of the prince Dhṛtarāṣṭra exceeded that of all others; and throughout the three worlds there was no one to equal Vidura for his constancy in *dharma* and his profound knowledge of *dharma*, O king. The line of Śāntanu, which had seemed destroyed, was now redeemed. When people saw this, a saying became

<sup>1</sup> The mythical land of the northern Kurus was said to resemble heaven on earth.

current throughout every land: 'Among mothers of heroes, the Kāśi princesses; among countries, the land of the Kurus; among experts in *dharma*, Bhīṣma; among cities, Hāstīnapura!' However, Dhṛtarāṣṭra could not take on the kingship because of his blindness, and Vidura could not do so because of his mixed parentage; so Pāṇḍu became king.

[103] Bhīṣma spoke to the princes: 'This line of ours is famed for the excellence of its virtues and its sovereignty over other kings on earth. Protected by virtuous and noble kings of old, this line of ours has never fallen into decay; now, thanks to myself, Satyavatī, and the noble Kṛṣṇa Vyāsa, it is once again well established, for you are the threads of the lineage. Vidura my son, both I myself, and more especially you, must act so that this line continues to swell like the ocean.'

'I have heard of a Yādava princess, one suitable for this line of ours, and also of the daughters of Subala and the Madra king. All of these girls are well-born and beautiful; they are all under their elders' rule; and those bull-like Kṣatriyas too are fit for an alliance with us. It seems to me that, to extend the line, we should make a match with them. You are the wisest of the wise, O Vidura; what do you think?'

Vidura replied, 'You, sir, are our father, you are our mother, you are our most venerated elder; so please decide yourself what will be best for this line, and do it!'

Bhīṣma now learnt from priests that Gāndhārī, Subala's daughter, had worshipped Śiva, the boon-granting god, the blinder of Bhaga; they told him that the lovely Gāndhārī had received the boon of a hundred sons. When Bhīṣma heard that this was so, the grandfather of the Kurus sent word to the king of Gāndhāra. Subala was concerned at Dhṛtarāṣṭra's blindness, but when he gave his mind to thoughts of line, of reputation, and of conduct, he gave the virtuous Gāndhārī to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. When Gāndhārī herself learnt that Dhṛtarāṣṭra was blind, and that her parents wished to marry her to him, O heir of Bharata, the lovely woman took a piece of cloth, folded it repeatedly, and covered her own eyes, O king, for she was intent on serving her husband, and determined to take no precedence over him.

Śakuni, the king of Gāndhāra's son, set out for the Kauravas with his sister, who carried a great fortune; the hero gave his sister to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, together with a fitting retinue, and then returned to his own city after

being honoured by Bhīṣma. As for Gāndhārī of the fine hips, she pleased all the Kurus with her demeanour, her good behaviour and her performance of her duties, O heir of Bharata. She won them all over with her conduct; intent on serving her husband and strict in her vows, she would not even speak of other men.

[104] The ruler of the Yadus, Vasudeva's father,<sup>1</sup> was named Śūra; he had a daughter named Pṛthā, whose beauty was unrivalled upon earth. That hero had formerly promised his firstborn offspring to Kuntibhoja, son of his father's sister, who was childless and had sought this favour; and since his firstborn was Pṛthā, he gave the girl to him, as friend to noble friend.<sup>2</sup> In her new father's house her duties included serving both gods and guests, and so it happened that she waited on that fierce, terrible Brahmin of keen vows known as Durvāsas, a seer who reserved his moral judgements. She made great efforts to satisfy this fierce man of keen resolve, and the sage, foreseeing troubled times ahead, gave her a magic *mantra*, and told her, 'Whichever god you call on with this *mantra* will graciously bestow on you a son!'

When she heard the priest speak these words, Kuntī, who was still a virgin of unsullied reputation, became curious, and called upon the Sun god. Then that girl of flawless limbs saw approaching her the Sun who gives life to the world, and when she saw this great wonder she 10 was astonished. The maker of light and heat now placed a child in her, and so she gave birth to a hero, best of all those who bear arms. This son of a god, covered with glory, was clad in armour: Kuntī's son was born bearing natural armour, and with earrings illuminating his face. He became famous throughout all the worlds as Karna. The great light, best of all gift-givers, restored her virginity, and then returned to

Then, wishing to conceal the wrong that she had done and fearful of her kin, Kuntī cast her son away in the river, despite his auspicious marks. A Sūta charioteer of good renown and his wife Rādhā adopted 15 the abandoned child as their son; they performed the name-giving ceremony for the boy, saying, 'He was born with riches; let him be

<sup>1</sup> And thus paternal grandfather to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva.

<sup>2</sup> Pṛthā is subsequently known as Kuntī, after her adoptive father's name.

Vasuṣena, "Richly armed"! As this mighty hero grew, he became adept with every weapon, and he paid honour to the Sun until his back was burnt.

Now whenever this hero, true to his vows, was seated at prayer, there was nothing that the noble man would not give to Brahmins. Radiant Indra who gives life to creatures took on the form of a Brahmin beggar and asked him for his earrings and his armour; sadly, Karṇa cut from his body the armour, flowing with blood, and the earrings, and, joining his hands together, offered them to him. Astonished, Indra gave to him a Spear, with the words, 'Whether god, demon or man, whether Gandharva, serpent or Rākṣasa, the one at whom you throw this Spear in anger shall cease to be!' Until that day his name had been Vasuṣena, but from then on, by virtue of that deed, he became Karṇa the Cutter.

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[105] Kuntibhoja's daughter was beautiful, mettlesome and virtuous; she delighted in *dharma* and kept mighty vows. When her father held her *swayamvara*, she chose from amongst the thousands of Kṣatriyas the lion-toothed, elephant-shouldered, bull-eyed, mighty Pāṇḍu; united with Kuntibhoja's daughter, like Indra with Paulomī, Kuru's heir was filled with boundless joy.

Bhiṣma now travelled to the city of the Madras, and there purchased for Pāṇḍu at great cost the daughter of the Madra king, Mādrī, famed throughout the three worlds and celebrated amongst all kings for her beauty, unrivalled upon earth. Then he had noble Pāṇḍu's wedding rites performed. When the guests, men from all round the world, saw the tiger-like Pāṇḍu, lion-chested, elephant-shouldered, bull-eyed, full of spirit, they were astonished.

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Pāṇḍu now sets out on military campaigns against Daśārṇa, Magadha, Mithilā, and the Kāśis, Suhmas and Puṇḍras. Everywhere he triumphs, bringing his enemies under his sway and carrying their wealth back to a jubilant Hāstīnapura.

[106] With Dhṛitarāṣṭra's agreement, Pāṇḍu shares out the wealth he has won. Dhṛitarāṣṭra offers many lavish sacrifices. Pāṇḍu lives in the forest with his two wives, spending his time hunting. Bhiṣma marries Vidura to an illegitimate daughter of King Devaka, who bears him many sons.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[107] Then, O Janamejaya, a hundred sons were born to Dhṛtarāṣṭra from Gāndhārī, and one further son from a Vaiśya woman. And five sons, mighty chariot-fighters, were born to Pāṇḍu from Kuntī and Mādrī; they came from the gods, to extend the line.

Janamejaya spoke:

Truest of Brahmins, how did Gāndhārī bear a hundred sons? How long did it take? How long did they live? And how was one son born to Dhṛtarāṣṭra from a Vaiśya woman? How did Dhṛtarāṣṭra come to be unfaithful to such a virtuous wife as Gāndhārī, when she was so good to him? And how were five sons, mighty chariot-fighters come from the gods, born to Pāṇḍu when he had been cursed by that noble man?<sup>1</sup> Learned ascetic, recount all this in detail as it occurred! I am never sated with tales of my kin.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa once approached Gāndhārī exhausted with hunger and weariness. She ministered to his needs, and in return he granted her a boon. She chose for herself a hundred sons, the equals of her husband, and in the course of time she conceived by Dhṛtarāṣṭra. For two years Gāndhārī carried the embryo within her, but she did not give birth. Then, full of woe, she learnt that Kuntī had born a son, radiant and strong as the morning sun, while her own belly remained hard and unchanged, and she fell to thinking. Unknown to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī with a mighty effort caused the embryo to fall from her womb, for she was overcome with misery. Then there emerged a dense mass of flesh like a ball of iron, and though she had carried it in her womb for two years, she prepared to cast it away; but Dvaipāyana heard of this and hurried to her. Best of all those who pray, he saw that mass of flesh, and said, 'Daughter of Subala, what is this you are about to do?' She revealed her thoughts truthfully to the mighty seer: 'I learnt that Kuntī had born a son, radiant as the sun, and then, in terrible misery, I caused

<sup>1</sup> The story of this curse is not told in full until 1.109, but Vaiśampāyana had earlier related a brief version of it to Janamejaya at 1.90.63-4.

this embryo to fall from my womb. Long ago, you told me that you granted me a hundred sons; and now, in place of a hundred sons, I have born this mass of flesh.'

Vyāsa answered her. 'Daughter of Subala, that is what I said, and it will certainly not prove false! I have never told an untruth even in a trivial case, much less over serious matters. Let a hundred pots filled with ghee be quickly set in place; then sprinkle this ball with cold water.'

When the ball was sprinkled, it separated into a hundred embryos, each the size of a joint of one's thumb; altogether, as time passed, lord of the peoples, a hundred and one embryos emerged one after another from that mass of flesh. The blessed Vyāsa then placed the embryos in the pots and arranged for them to be guarded in well-protected places; and he instructed Gāndhārī, 'Break open these pots after a further two years have passed.' After speaking so and making such arrangements, wise Vyāsa then went to Mount Himālaya to undertake austerities.

As that time passed, King Duryodhana was born from among them; but in terms of birth, King Yudhiṣṭhira was the eldest.

As soon as his son was born, Dhṛtarāṣṭra convened many priests, and also Bhīṣma and Vidura, and said, 'Yudhiṣṭhira is the eldest prince; he will bring glory to our line. He has attained the kingship through his merits, and we have no complaint. But, after him, will this child become king in turn? Tell me the truth; tell me what is to be!'

As he finished speaking, O heir of Bharata, there came from every direction the cries of terrible carrion creatures and the ominous howling of jackals. When they observed all these dreadful portents, O king, the Brahmins and sagacious Vidura spoke: 'It is plain that this son of yours will bring the line to its end: abandoning him will mean peace, rearing him great calamity. Be content with ninety-nine sons, O king; and with this one, act for the welfare of the world and of your line! "Give up one member for the sake of the family; give up one family for the sake of the village; give up one village for the sake of the kingdom; give up the earth for the sake of yourself!"'

<sup>1</sup> This saying is cited again at 2.55.10, where it is attributed to Śukra, the demons' household priest, and then again at 5.37.16 and 5.126.48.

This was the advice of Vidura and of all those Brahmins; but the king did not act upon it, for he was filled with love for his son.

Now in the course of a month, O prince, all Dhṛtarāṣṭra's hundred sons were born, and so was one further child, a girl. And it seems that while Gāndhārī was afflicted with her distended belly, a Vaiśya woman used to serve strong-armed Dhṛtarāṣṭra; within the year, O king, she gave birth to his illegitimate son, the wise Yuyutsu of great renown. Thus to wise Dhṛtarāṣṭra were born a hundred sons, heroes and great chariot-fighters all, together with a single daughter, Duḥśalā.

[108] — Janamejaya asks to hear the names of all the hundred Dhṛtarāṣṭras, in order of their birth, and Vaiśampāyana lists them, starting with Duryodhana, Yuyutsu and Duḥśasana. — All of them are given a full education and, in due time, are married. The daughter Duḥśalā is also married, to Jayadratha king of Sindhu.

[109] — Janamejaya now asks to hear of the birth of the Pāṇḍavas, and Vaiśampāyana narrates. — Pāṇḍu is hunting in the forest: he shoots a pair of deer as they mate. The deer are in fact a great ascetic and his wife in animal form; before dying, the male deer remonstrates with Pāṇḍu for his act and curses him to suffer the same fate: when he makes love he will die, and his lover will follow him into death. [110] Griefstricken, Pāṇḍu determines on a life of extreme austerities: his wives Kuntī and Mādrī persuade him to allow them to accompany him. Pāṇḍu now returns all his kingly apparel to Hāstīnapura, announcing that he will remain in the forest as an ascetic.

[III] Living a life of virtue and asceticism in the forest, Pāṇḍu strives to reach heaven and so heads northward, but is advised by ascetics that the way is too hard for his wives to travel. He expresses his despair at his childless state; the ascetics assure him that he will acquire offspring. He now tells Kuntī that she should conceive with the aid of a Brahmin. [112] Kuntī demurs, and tells Pāṇḍu the story of King Vyusitāśva, who died childless: his widow received from her dead husband the boon of conceiving from his corpse. In the same way she herself can be impregnated by Pāṇḍu mentally, by means of his ascetic power. [113] Pāṇḍu remains adamant: for a wife to refuse her husband's wish that she conceive is as sinful as abortion or adultery. As King Kalmāṣapāda's wife conceived with the aid of Vasiṣṭha, as Pāṇḍu himself was conceived with the aid of Vyāsa, so Kuntī must conceive with a Brahmin's aid. Kuntī now tells him of the boon given

her by Durvāsas, allowing her to gain a son by any god she chooses to invoke, and Pāṇḍu tells her to invoke the god Dharma, so that she may give birth to a righteous son.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[II4] Gāndhārī had been pregnant for a year, O Janamejaya, when Queen Kuntī called upon invincible Dharma to give her a child: she hastened to make an offering to him, and she recited in the proper manner the *mantra* that Durvāsas had previously given her. Kuntī of fine hips lay with Dharma, who assumed bodily form through the power of Yoga, and she conceived a son, best of all living beings, at the midday hour called 'Victory', when the Jyeṣṭhā constellation was in conjunction with the moon, in the bright half of the month, on an auspicious day. In time, Kuntī gave birth to a son of great renown. As soon as that son was born, an incorporeal voice proclaimed: 'This child, Pāṇḍu's firstborn son, will be the best upholder of *dharma*, make no doubt! Known as Yudhiṣṭhira, he will be a famous king, renowned throughout the three worlds for his glory, his ardour and his conduct.'

Having obtained a son through Dharma, Pāṇḍu now spoke again to Kuntī: 'It is said that Kṣatriyas excel in strength; ask now for a son who excels in strength!' When Kuntī heard her husband's words, it was the Wind god Vāyu whom she called upon; and so was born Bhīma, 'the terrible one', a strong-armed hero of terrible valour. When he was born, strong to excess, invincible, the voice spoke once more, O heir of Bharata: 'This newborn child will be the best of all the mighty!' And a miracle occurred as soon as wolf-belly Bhīma was born: he fell from his mother's lap and smashed a mountain to fragments with his limbs. It seems that Kuntī suddenly stood up, troubled by fear of tigers, forgetting that the wolf-belly lay sleeping in her lap; then the child, whose body was dense as adamant, fell on the mountain, and as he fell he smashed it to fragments with his limbs, to the astonishment of the watching Pāṇḍu. On the very day of Bhīma's birth, O truest heir of Bharata, Duryodhana too was born.

After the birth of Bhīma, Pāṇḍu fell again to thinking: 'How may I

get an excellent son, the best son in the world? This world is founded upon divine destiny and human aspiration; but even what is destined only comes to us through timely action. Now Indra is said to be king and chief of the gods, immeasurably mighty and determined, heroic, boundless in splendour. I shall win his favour with austerities to obtain from him a very mighty son. The son that Indra gives me will be most excellent; therefore I shall perform great austerities through deeds, thoughts and words.'

Now Kuru's heir, Pāṇḍu of great ardour, consulted mighty seers  
 20 and told Kuntī to undertake an auspicious vow lasting a year. As for himself, the strong-armed hero remained standing on one foot, and practised fierce asceticism with his mind intensely focused; intent on winning the favour of that god who is lord of the gods, O heir of Bharata, righteous Pāṇḍu pursued his austerities as the sun pursued its course. And after the passage of much time, Indra answered him: 'I shall give you a son who will be famed throughout the three worlds; I shall give you a son, a leader to bring destruction to all his enemies and to accomplish the purposes of gods, Brahmins and his friends!'

Hearing the words of noble Indra, king of the gods, and mindful  
 25 of them, the righteous Kuru king spoke to Kuntī: 'Lady of fine hips, bear me a son, noble, skilled at governance, radiant and strong as the sun, unconquerable, vigorous, supremely handsome, full of the Kṣatriya ardour! I have won this favour from Indra, lord of the gods; call upon him, sweet-smiling lady!' At his request, that lady of high repute now called on Indra; and the lord of the gods came to her, and fathered Arjuna upon her. As soon as the boy was born, the incorporeal voice proclaimed, making the sky resound with its deep and mighty thunder: 'Kuntī, this child will be courageous as Kārtavīrya, valiant as  
 30 Śibi, invincible as Indra; he will spread your fame. As Aditi's joy was increased by Viṣṇu, so Arjuna, Viṣṇu's equal, will increase your joy. He will exercise authority over the Madras, the Kurus with the Kekayas, and the Cedis, Kāśīs and Karūṣas; he will truly raise the Kuru banner. Through the might of his arm the Fire god will be fully sated with the fat of all the creatures in the Khāṇḍava forest. He will lead his people to victory over the lords of the earth; with his brothers he will perform

three horse sacrifices.<sup>1</sup> The equal of Jamadagni's son Rāma, O Kuntī, as valiant as Viṣṇu, best of the brave, this bull-like hero will never suffer defeat; and he will obtain all the celestial weapons, and restore a fortune that was lost.'

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Kuntī heard this most wonderful speech spoken at the birth of her son by the wind in the sky. The ascetics living on the hundred-peaked mountain heard the loud proclamation, and they were filled with the greatest joy, and so were the divine seers, and the gods led by Indra. There was a tumultuous sound of drums in the air; a mighty roar arose, while flowers showered down, and all the hosts of the gods came together to honour Kuntī's son, together with serpents, divine birds, Gandharvas and Apsarases, all the lords of creation, and the seven great seers.

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But Pāṇḍu of great renown, longing for yet more sons, urged on the lovely Kuntī; she, however, answered, 'The wise do not favour a fourth child, even in times of trouble. After three, they say the woman must be driven by lust; if there is a fifth, she must be a whore. You know that this is *dharma*, and that it makes sense; so how is it that now you act against it, as if through forgetfulness, and ask me for more children?'

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[115] Now after the birth of Kuntī's sons and those of Dhṛitarāṣṭra, the Madra princess Mādrī spoke to Pāṇḍu in private. 'Afflicter of your enemies, I would not grieve even if you acted ill towards me, and so, sinless king, I do not grieve to remain always lower in rank than the estimable Kuntī; nor did I feel sorrow on hearing of the birth of Gāndhārī's hundred sons, O heir of Kuru. Yet this great sorrow I do bear: both wives were equally sonless, but now my husband has been blessed with offspring from Kuntī. If King Kuntibhoja's daughter were to help me bear children, it would be a kindness to me, and a benefit also to you. Since we are co-wives I feel constraint in speaking of this to Kuntī; but if you are well disposed towards me, urge her yourself in my cause.'

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Pāṇḍu replied, 'This matter is always in my thoughts too, O Mādrī, but I have not ventured to speak of it to you, as I was not sure whether

<sup>1</sup> In fact the Pāṇḍavas perform a single such sacrifice, but at Vyāsa's bidding it involves three times the normal expenditure on gifts to Brahmins; according to Vyāsa, this makes it equivalent to three sacrifices (14.90.14-15).

you would be pleased or hurt. However, now I know your thoughts I shall do my best. I am sure that when I speak to Kuntī she will accept what I say.'

Next, Pāṇḍu spoke privately to Kuntī. 'Confer offspring on my line, and a benefit on the world! O fair one, do this most excellent deed, both to please me, and to prevent my funeral offerings, and those of my forebears, from destruction. For your own renown, too, carry out this very difficult task! Even after gaining the sovereignty, Indra continued to sacrifice, for he wished for renown; in the same way, lovely one, priests who know the Vedas and have performed the hardest austerities still take instruction from religious elders, for the sake of renown; and royal seers and great ascetic Brahmins too have performed, for renown, many kinds of difficult deeds. Therefore, blameless lady, you should rescue Mādrī from her shipwreck, and win the highest fame by bestowing offspring on her!'

Kuntī heard her husband's request, and then went and spoke to Mādrī: 'Think now of some deity, and, make no doubt, you will receive from him a child like himself!' So Mādrī reflected briefly, and then mentally invoked the two Aśvins; and they came to her, and fathered twin sons on her, Nakula and Sahadeva, whose beauty was incomparable on earth. Then, as before, the incorporeal voice proclaimed those twins: 'These two will far outshine all others in beauty, mettle and virtue, in ardour and in wealth.'

The ascetics living on the hundred-peaked mountain performed the naming ritual for all five boys, lord of the peoples, with love and ceremony and blessings. First they attended to Kuntī's sons, naming the eldest Yudhiṣṭhīra, the middle one Bhīma, and the third Arjuna; then the priests affectionately named the sons of Mādrī: the firstborn Nakula, the other Sahadeva. Those truest of Kurus were born a year apart from one another.

Now Pāṇḍu urged Kuntī once again in Mādrī's cause; but when he repeatedly asked her help in private, O king, she answered, 'I spoke to her once: she got two children. In doing so she cheated me! I fear that she may get the better of me, for that is how women act. I was a fool not to realize that a double invocation would bring a double reward. This is why you should not make me act again: please grant me this boon!'

In this way were born Pāṇḍu's five mighty sons, gifts of the gods, famed as the glories of the Kuru line. They possessed the auspicious marks; they were fair to look on as the moon; proud as lions, treading valiantly like lions, lion-necked, those mighty bowmen grew up as princes of men with the valour of gods. And as they grew up on sacred Mount Himālaya they caused amazement to the great seers assembled there, for these five, and their hundred cousins, all glories of the Kuru line, grew swiftly as lotuses in water.

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[116] One lovely spring day, Pāṇḍu is overcome by lust for Mādrī; despite her efforts to prevent him, and forgetting his danger, he insists on making love to her, and so dies. Kuntī upbraids Mādrī, and proposes to follow Pāṇḍu into death, but Mādrī insists that this is her duty; she instructs Kuntī to treat the twins like her own sons, and then mounts Pāṇḍu's funeral pile. [117] The great seers of Himālaya swiftly conduct Kuntī, the five Pāṇḍava boys and Pāṇḍu's body to Hāstīnapura. Great crowds greet their arrival. They introduce Pāṇḍu's sons to the Kurus, and tell of his death and that of Mādrī; then they vanish. [118] At Dhṛtarāṣṭra's command, Vidura has the funeral rites performed. The bodies of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī are taken with all reverence to a wooded spot on the bank of the Gaṅgā, anointed and perfumed, and set ablaze, while all the people lament bitterly. There follow twelve days of mourning.

[119] The śrāddha ceremony is performed for Pāṇḍu, accompanied by feasting and rich gifts to the Brahmins. When it is over, Vyāsa tells his grieving mother Satyavatī that hard times lie ahead, and advises her to retire to the forest. She does so, taking with her Ambikā and Ambālikā: they perform great austerities there, and after some time they die.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

Meanwhile, the Pāṇḍavas passed through the consecration ceremonies prescribed by the Veda, and grew up in their father's house, enjoying themselves and playing with the Dhārtarāṣṭras. In all their childish games, the Pāṇḍavas outstripped their cousins. Bhīma wiped the floor with all Dhārtarāṣṭra's sons at racing and catching, at eating, at scattering dust: as they played hide-and-seek, Pāṇḍu's son would joyously seize them, grab hold of their heads, and force them to fight him; there were a hundred and one of them, princes of great power, but wolf-belly Bhīma had

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no difficulty in beating them single-handed. The mighty boy would grab them by the feet, knock them violently down, and drag them shrieking along the ground, grazing their knees and heads and blacking their eyes. When he played in the water, he would seize ten boys in his 20 arms and hold them underwater, releasing them half-dead; and when they climbed a tree to pick its fruit, Bhīma would kick it, and make it shake so hard with the impact of the blow that all the boys would be shaken out of the tree, losing their footing at once and falling headlong with the fruit. The princes struggled to rival the wolf-belly, but they could never get the better of him, whether in fights or races, or other sports. And so in their rivalry Bhīma came to be deeply hated by the Dhārtarāshtras, not because he meant them harm, but because of his childish ways.

25 When Duryodhana of great energy saw all this and understood Bhīma's might, he showed his evil nature. Averse to *dharma* and seeing wickedness everywhere, the foolish prince formed a wicked plan out of greed for power. 'First let me kill the wolf-belly, strongest of the strong, the middle son of Kuntī and Pāṇḍu, by trickery; afterwards I shall triumph over the younger, and over Yudhiṣṭhira the elder too; I shall hold them captive, and rule the earth!' Then, after taking this decision, wicked Duryodhana remained constantly on the watch for a chance to hurt the noble Bhīma.

30 He set up large, splendid tents for water-sports, O heir of Bharata, at Pramāṇakoṭi on the Gaṅgā. When their games were done, the princes all came ashore, donned clean clothes and fine ornaments, and feasted at their leisure upon food rich with every delicacy they might desire. At the end of the day the Kuru heroes, weary from their sports, slept happily in their tents. Now mighty Bhīma was exhausted, for he had exerted himself more than the rest, giving rides to the other princes as they played in the water. He climbed up on to dry land at Pramāṇakoṭi, and fell asleep for the night in a cool spot he had found, worn out and rather drunk: the Pāṇḍava lay motionless in sleep, O king, as if he were dead. Gently, Duryodhana now bound Bhīma with ropes made of creepers, and then pushed him off the bank into the deep, fierce-flowing 35 river. But Kuntī's son, the best of fighting men, awoke, burst all his bonds, and emerged once more from the water.

When Bhīma fell asleep once more, Duryodhana took deadly, sharp-fanged snakes and set them to bite him furiously in every single limb and vital organ. But though they sank their fangs into his vitals, they could not break the broad-chested hero's skin, so strong was he. Bhīma awoke; he crushed all the snakes, and then killed Duryodhana's much-loved charioteer with a blow of his hand.

Next, Duryodhana took deadliest poison, freshly gathered and horribly virulent, and had it mixed into Bhīma's food. Yuyutsu, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son by a Vaiśya woman, told Bhīma, for he wished the Pāṇḍavas well. But Bhīma ate it anyway, and digested it without ill effects: the poison was most virulent, yet it had no effect, for Bhīma's strength was so terrible that he could still digest it. 40

So it was that Duryodhana, with Karṇa and Subala's son Śakuni, attempted to kill the Pāṇḍavas with a variety of tricks. The foe-taming Pāṇḍavas knew all about this, but they mentioned it to no one, in accordance with Vidura's advice.

[120] Now Śaradvat had alarmed Indra by his fierce asceticism and martial supremacy, so he had sent an Apsaras named Jālapadī to break his austerities. When he saw her beautiful half-clothed form his seed gushed forth without his knowledge: it fell into a bed of reeds, where it divided in two and became twin children. Śaṃtanu had come upon the pair when hunting, and brought them up, naming the boy Krpa and his sister Krpī; later Śaradvat found them, and taught Krpa his martial skills. [121] Similarly, the seer Bharadvāja too had spilled his seed on seeing the Apsaras Ghṛtācī: he placed it in the Soma vessel, from which Drona was born. Drona grew up to be learned in the Veda and a master of the Fire Weapon; he was a friend of Drupada, son of King Pṛṣata of Pāñcāla. After his father's death he had married Krpa's sister Krpī, from whom he obtained a son, Aśvatthāman. He had also obtained weapons and the associated knowledge from Rāma Jāmadagnya.

[122] Drona visits his friend Drupada, but Drupada repudiates their friendship. Furious, Drona leaves and travels to Hāstīnapura; here he impresses the young princes by his skill at shooting reeds. Bhīṣma, who is seeking for a suitable teacher for the young Kuru princes, interviews him and hears that following his rift with Drupada he is looking for suitable pupils. Drona takes on the princes, first demanding their promise that when they have mastered weaponry they will

carry out an undisclosed task for him; the others remain silent, but Arjuna gives his word. Drona now teaches them the martial skills. Various other princes also receive instruction from Drona, including Karṇa, who looks down on the Pāṇḍavas. [123] Arjuna becomes an excellent warrior, Drona's favourite pupil.

A Niṣāda prince named Ekalavya seeks to become Drona's pupil, but Drona refuses him. Ekalavya goes into the forest and makes an image of Drona which he reveres as his teacher, and practises his skills. One day when the Kuru princes are hunting they observe Ekalavya perform an amazing feat of archery. Asked to identify himself, he answers that he is a Niṣāda prince and Drona's pupil. Arjuna now mentions to Drona that his other pupil Ekalavya is even better at archery than he is himself. Drona goes to see Ekalavya, and demands his fee: Ekalavya's right thumb, which Ekalavya happily cuts off and gives him. Now no one can outdo Arjuna. All the princes are excellent warriors, specializing in various forms of fighting, but it is Arjuna who outdoes all the others: he wins the test of concentration that Drona sets them all, and rescues Drona when he is attacked by a crocodile while bathing. Drona rewards him with the *Weapon of Brahmā's Head*.

### THE BURNING OF THE HOUSE OF LAC

[124] When he considers that the Kuru princes have completed their studies with him, Drona arranges a demonstration of their martial skills. Great crowds turn out to watch. First they display their amazing abilities at archery, then at swordplay. Next, Duryodhana and Bhīma prepare to battle each other with clubs. [125] The crowd take sides and become unruly; fearing a riot, Drona has the match stopped, and introduces Arjuna: there are roars of approval. Arjuna demonstrates the Weapons he has acquired from Drona, and shows off his astonishing skills at archery and with other weapons. As the event is about to end, the heroic beating of arm against breast is heard outside the arena.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[126] The people fell back, their eyes opened wide in amazement, as Karṇa, the conqueror of enemy fortresses, entered the vast arena like a walking mountain, bearing his natural armour, with his ear-rings illuminating his face, and carrying bow and dagger. Son of the

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virgin Kuntī, Karṇa of wide fame and wide eyes was a portion of the keen-rayed Sun god and a slayer of enemy hosts; his courage and valour matched those of mighty lions and bulls and elephants, and in radiance, brilliance and splendour he was like sun, moon or fire. The glorious son of the Sun was as tall as a golden palm tree, a young man of countless virtues and strong as a lion. Strong-armed Karṇa looked all round the circular arena, and bowed to Drona and Kṛpa with, as it seemed, no great respect. Transfixed and motionless, the whole crowd was convulsed with curiosity to know who this could be. Then Karṇa, best of all those who speak, spoke in a voice deep as a thundercloud, brother to unknown brother, son of the Sun addressing the son of Indra: 'Son of Kuntī, whatever you have done, I shall outdo it before the eyes of all these men; so do not indulge in self-admiration!'

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Before he had finished speaking, O best of all those who speak, the whole crowd leapt to their feet as if propelled by some machine. Duryodhana felt joy, tiger-like hero, but Arjuna was filled at once with shame and anger. Now Karṇa, ever revelling in battle, received Drona's assent; and everything that Arjuna had done there, that mighty hero repeated. At this, Duryodhana with his brothers joyfully embraced Karṇa, and he said, 'Welcome, strong-armed hero! We are blessed by your coming, bestower of honour! I, and the Kuru kingdom, are at your disposal to do with as you wish!' Karṇa replied, 'I accept your friendship: nothing else matters to me. But I wish to fight against Kuntī's son in single combat, heir of Bharata!' 'Enjoy the pleasures of life with me,' answered Duryodhana, 'and act to benefit your kin; but place your foot upon the heads of all your enemies, O foe-tamer!'

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Arjuna considered that he had been insulted, and so he addressed Karṇa, who stood like a mountain amongst the Dhārtarāṣṭra brothers: 'O Karṇa, yours will be the realms of the uninvited guest and the uninvited prattler, once I have slain you!' Karṇa replied, 'This arena is open to all: what is it to you, Arjuna? Kṣatriyas excel in heroism, and dharma defers to strength; why trade in insults, the consolation of the weak? Talk with your arrows, heir of Bharata, till my arrows carry off your head while your teacher looks on!'

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Now Arjuna, the conqueror of enemy fortresses, received Drona's

assent; swiftly he was embraced by his brothers, and then he approached Karṇa to do battle. And for his part, Karṇa was embraced by Duryodhana and all his brothers, and stood ready to fight, grasping bow and arrows. Then clouds covered the sky, with lightning and thunder; rainbows, the bows of Indra, appeared, while lines of cranes shone white. Seeing Indra himself looking down on the arena, the Sun god showed his own affection by burning up any clouds that approached too close.<sup>1</sup> So it was that Pāṇḍu's son Arjuna was seen to be hidden by the shadow of the clouds, while Karṇa was encircled by sunshine.

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The sons of Dhṛitarāṣṭra were stationed next to Karṇa; Bharadvāja's son Drona, and Kṛpa and Bhīṣma, stood by Arjuna son of Kuntī. The men in the arena took sides, and so did the women; but Kuntibhoja's daughter Kuntī, who understood what was happening, fainted. Vidura, expert in *dharma*, revived her from her faint by sprinkling her with sandal-scented water; then, restored to consciousness, she gazed at her two sons in their armour, and she grieved, but did not try to approach them.

As the two warriors stood brandishing their great bows, Kṛpa son of Śaradvat, who was skilled in the rules of single combat and expert in *dharma*, addressed them: 'Here stands the younger son of Kuntī, son of Pāṇḍu, descendant of Kuru. He will fight you in single combat, sir. Now you too, strong-armed hero, must announce your mother, father and the royal lineage of which you are the glory. Once this is known to Kuntī's son, he will fight you, or he will not.'

When Karṇa heard these words he bowed his head in shame, like a lotus flower that droops when drenched by rain. Duryodhana intervened: 'According to the learned texts, there are three types of king, sir: the one who is of royal line, the one who is a hero, and the one who leads an army. If Arjuna here is unwilling to fight with anyone not a king, then this man will be consecrated by me as king over Aṅga!' And there and then the glorious, mighty chariot-fighter Karṇa was consecrated king of Aṅga by priests who knew the Vedas, with parched grain, flowers and golden pots, while he sat on a golden seat. After the shouts of 'Victory!',

<sup>1</sup> The rain god Indra and the Sun are giving support to their respective earthly offspring, Arjuna and Karṇa.

the bull-like king Karṇa, shaded by a royal umbrella, fanned by yak-tail fans, then spoke to the Kaurava king Duryodhana: 'What may I give to you to equal this gift of kingship? Speak, tiger-like king, and I shall do it!' Duryodhana answered, 'I want your friendship for ever!' Karṇa heard these words, and gave his assent. Then with the greatest joy the two men embraced.

[127] But now, as if in challenge, the Sūta Adhiratha entered the arena. His upper garment was out of place, and he was sweating and trembling as he supported himself with a stick. When Karṇa saw him, he laid down his bow; driven by respect for his father, he greeted him, bowing a head still wet with the water of his royal consecration. The charioteer made haste to cover his feet with the edge of his garment,<sup>1</sup> and addressed the man who had achieved such great things as 'My son'; he embraced him, and, distracted with love, further moistened with his tears that head still wet from consecration as king of Aṅga.

When Pāṇḍu's son Bhīma saw Adhiratha and realized that Karṇa was a Sūta's son, he burst out laughing, and said, 'Son of a Sūta, you are not entitled to death in battle with Arjuna son of Kuntī! Take up your whip at once; as befits your birth! Nor are you entitled to enjoy the kingship of Aṅga, you lowliest of men, like a dog stealing the sacrificial rice-cake from next to the fire!'

When Karṇa heard these words, his lower lip began to throb; exhaling deeply, he fixed his eye on the sun in the sky. But mighty Duryodhana leapt up in fury from where his brothers were sitting, like a rutting elephant bursting forth from a lotus pool, and he said to Bhīma, the doer of fearful deeds standing before him, 'Wolf-belly, it is not right for you to speak so. For Kṣatriyas, strength is the greatest virtue, and one should agree to fight against anyone calling himself a Kṣatriya; as the saying has it, the source of heroism is as mysterious as the source of rivers. Fire, which pervades the entire world, first sprang from water; the thunderbolt with which the demons were slain was fashioned from a bone of Dadhīca; the blessed god of war is utterly mysterious, for he is said to be the son of Fire, of the Kṛttikā stars, of Śiva, and of Gaṅgā

<sup>1</sup> To prevent Karṇa from touching his feet in self-abasement.

too;<sup>1</sup> it is known that the children of Kṣatriya mothers have become Brahmins; Drona our Teacher was born from a jar, and the venerable Kṛpa from a bed of reeds.<sup>2</sup> As for your own births, all the kings have heard how they occurred! This man was born with earrings and armour, and bears celestial marks; he resembles the very Sun. How could a doe give birth to such a tiger? Through the valour of his own arm, and my allegiance to him, this lord of men is entitled to kingship over the earth, not merely over Aṅga; and if there is a man who cannot accept what I have done, let him mount his chariot, or stand on foot, and bend his bow!

At this there was a great uproar throughout the arena, as well as cries of 'Bravo!' Now the sun set, and Duryodhana, taking Karṇa by the hand, O king, left the arena by the light of blazing lamps; the Pāṇḍavas too all returned to their own dwellings, lord of the peoples, as did Drona, Kṛpa and Bhīṣma. The spectators went their way, some saying 'Arjuna!', some 'Karṇa!', others 'Duryodhana!'

Now that Kuntī had recognized the king of Aṅga as her son, thanks to the celestial marks he bore, her secret joy increased for love of him. Duryodhana too, O prince, now that he had met Karṇa, rapidly lost his fear of Arjuna. As for heroic Karṇa himself, that most practised warrior always addressed Duryodhana in the friendliest manner. Even Yudhiṣṭhira now believed that there was no Bowman upon earth to match Karṇa.

[128] Now Drona asks the princes for his fee: they are to capture his enemy Drupada, king of Pāñcāla. This they do, ravaging his city. Drona reminds him how he repudiated their earlier friendship and proposes that they become friends again: Drupada will retain the southern half of his former kingdom. Drupada assents, but in his heart he harbours enmity towards Drona; he awaits the birth of a son to avenge him.

[129] Duryodhana becomes aware that the people favour the installation of

<sup>1</sup> This god, known as Skanda, Kumāra and Kārttikeya (and referred to here as Guha, 'the mysterious one'), was born from Śiva's seed, which had been contained for a while by both Fire and Gaṅgā; he was raised by the Kṛttikās (Pleiades). See further 9.43.

<sup>2</sup> See 1.120-21.

*Yudhiṣṭhīra as king. He goes to see Dhṛtarāṣṭra and warns him that his line is in danger of being excluded from the kingship in perpetuity: something must be done.* [130] *Dhṛtarāṣṭra remonstrates: Pāṇḍu was a virtuous and popular king, and his son Yudhiṣṭhīra resembles him. If Duryodhana and his brothers use force against him, they will be killed by his supporters. Duryodhana suggests that instead the Pāṇḍavas should be sent away to Vāraṇāvata under some harmless pretext; while they are away he will induce the people to change their loyalty with gifts. Once he is secure in the kingship his cousins can return. Again Dhṛtarāṣṭra objects: the elders would be bound to punish such a wicked act. No, replies Duryodhana. Bhīṣma will remain impartial; Drona will follow his son Aśvatthāman, who sides with Duryodhana; Kṛpa will take the same side, for Drona is married to his sister; and Vidura is financially dependent on the Dhārtarāṣṭras. It is time for action.*

[131] *Dhṛtarāṣṭra now has his counsellors sing the praises of Vāraṇāvata, and when the Pāṇḍavas' curiosity is aroused urges them in person to pay a visit there. Yudhiṣṭhīra is powerless to oppose Dhṛtarāṣṭra's wish; he goes to see the elders and asks for their blessing, then leaves for Vāraṇāvata with his brothers.*

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[132] *Wicked Duryodhana was overjoyed that the king had spoken so to the noble Pāṇḍavas. Now, bull-like heir of Bharata, he led Purocana, one of his aides, into a private room, and, taking him by the right hand, spoke as follows: 'This earth is mine, Purocana, with all its wealth; but as it is mine, so it is yours, and you should protect it! There is no one I trust more than you, no like-minded friend with whom I may discuss my affairs as I do with you. So follow my plans, sir, and wipe out my rivals by means of a cunning trick: act as I shall instruct.*

*'Dhṛtarāṣṭra has sent the Pāṇḍavas to Vāraṇāvata; at his command they will stay there during the coming festival. So yoke mules to a fast cart and make sure you reach Vāraṇāvata yourself today. When you get there, have a house erected in a well-secluded spot near to the weapon-store. Let it contain four great rooms: spare no expense! Make the builders use whatever materials are inflammable – hemp and resin and so forth – and make them plaster the walls with a clay mixed with ghee, oil and plenty of lac. Then place all over that house hemp, bamboo, ghee, wood, and*

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every other such contrivance; but do it in such a way that the Pāṇḍavas will not suspect you, even if they examine it closely, and other folk too will not realize that it is inflammable, or guess your motive.

15 'When the house is built there as I have said, you are to give it to the Pāṇḍavas, and Kuntī and her friends, for their dwelling, showing them every honour. Excellent seats, carriages and beds are to be installed there for them, so that my father will be pleased, and everything is to be arranged for them to stay in the city of Vāraṇāvata, free from all suspicion – until the time comes. But then, once you know they are sleeping in utter confidence of their safety, you are to open the door and set fire to the house. In this way the Pāṇḍavas will be burnt alive, but all that their relatives or other folk will say of them is that they died in a fire in their own house.'

Purocana now promised the Kaurava to do as he had said, and set out by mule-cart for the city of Vāraṇāvata. He travelled swiftly, O king, in accordance with Duryodhana's wishes, and did everything just as his prince had bidden him.

[133] *The Pāṇḍavas bid farewell to the elders. Some of the Brahmins deplore Dhṛitarāṣṭra's behaviour and propose to follow them, but Yudhiṣṭhīra tells them to return home and asks for their blessing. Vidura uses covert language to warn Yudhiṣṭhīra of danger from poison and fire. The Pāṇḍavas set out, and arrive in Vāraṇāvata. [134] The people of Vāraṇāvata greet the Pāṇḍavas with great honour. Purocana attends to their needs and then, after ten days, conducts them to the inflammable house he has had built. Yudhiṣṭhīra recognizes it for what it is, but none the less insists that they should stay, so as to avoid alerting Purocana. They must get to know the lie of the land, to aid them when the time comes to flee, and excavate a hiding-place where they will be safe from fire.*

[135] *A friend of Vidura arrives, a skilled excavator: he confirms that Purocana plans to burn them all alive. At Yudhiṣṭhīra's request he excavates a hiding-place for them under the house: from then on they sleep in it, spending their days travelling from forest to forest under the pretext of hunting.*

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[136] After he had seen them living there happily for a year, and observed their confidence, Purocana was filled with joy. But Kuntī's

son Yudhiṣṭhīra, expert in *dharma*, saw how joyful he seemed, and spoke to Bhīma, Arjuna and the twins: 'This wicked Purocana thinks we are utterly confident: we have fooled the cruel wretch. I believe the time for flight has come. We shall fire the weapon-store, burning Purocana too, and flee unobserved, leaving six other people lying here.'

So now, under the pretext of making a gift, Kuntī held a great night-time feast for Brahmins, O king. Women attended it, and enjoyed themselves, eating and drinking their fill, O heir of Bharata; then, late at night, they took leave of their hostess and left for their homes. Now it happened that a Niṣāda<sup>1</sup> woman, urged by fate, had come with her five sons to that feast in search of food. She and her sons drank liquor till they fell into a drunken stupor; then they all passed out, and lay in the Pāṇḍavas' house sleeping as if dead, O king. Then at dead of night, lord, while a violent wind blew, and while folk slept, Bhīma set fire to the place where Purocana was lying.

The blaze caused a mighty heat and noise, which awoke many people. The townsfolk said to one another, 'The wicked fool who carried out Duryodhana's command to have the house built, and then to have it burnt, has brought about his own death! Alas, alas, that Dhṛitarāṣṭra's mind should be so debased that he made his minister burn the pure Pāṇḍava boys alive! At least it is a blessing that the wicked, evil-minded man who burnt those trusting, sinless heroes has now himself been burnt.' The people of Vāraṇāvata stood all round the house that night, grieving in this fashion.

As for the Pāṇḍavas, O king, they escaped with their mother in great distress by means of their underground hiding-place, and went on in secret, unobserved; but, impeded by weariness and fear, those afflicters of their enemies and their mother could not move with haste. Then, lord of kings, Bhīma of terrible speed and valour took up all his brothers and his mother too, and strode forth. That hero, carrying his mother on his shoulder, the twins on his hip, and the two mighty brothers, Kuntī's sons, in his hands, went rapidly on, breaking trees in his speed and splitting open the earth with his feet — the ardent wolf-belly, swift as the wind.

<sup>1</sup> The Niṣādas were one of the barbarian tribes.

[137] The people of the town conclude that Purocana has murdered the Pāñdavas, and blame Duryodhana and Dhṛitarāṣṭra. They send word of the Pāñdavas' death to Dhṛitarāṣṭra, who grieves. Bhīma continues to bear his family towards safety. [138] He bounds on, carrying Kuntī and the other Pāñdavas. When evening comes they rest. Bhīma goes to fetch water: when he returns he weeps to see his noble family reduced to sleeping on the bare ground. He stays awake, watching.

### THE KILLING OF HIDIMBA

[139] As the Pāñdavas lie sleeping, a Rākṣasa named Hidimba who lives nearby smells them; he tells his sister Hidimbā to go and kill them so they can feast on human flesh. But when she sees Bhīma she falls in love with him. Assuming the form of a beautiful girl, she attempts to seduce him, but without success. [140] Hidimba, wondering at his sister's delay, follows her. When she sees him coming, Hidimbā offers to save Bhīma and his family, but Bhīma assures her that he does not need her help. Hidimba realizes her change of heart and attacks her.

[141] Bhīma jeers at the Rākṣasa and challenges him. They begin a fierce fight: Bhīma repeatedly drags Hidimba away to avoid waking his sleeping brothers. [142] However, the noise of the fight does awaken the Pāñdavas. Hidimbā explains to them who she is and what is happening. Arjuna taunts Bhīma, offering to help him kill the Rākṣasa: furious, Bhīma slays him at once.

### THE KILLING OF BAKA

[143] Then he threatens to kill Hidimbā too, but Yudhiṣṭhira prevents him. She pleads to be allowed to marry Bhīma: if her wish is granted she will assist the Pāñdavas. Yudhiṣṭhira assents, but insists that Bhīma must return to his family each night. Hidimbā and Bhīma travel into the mountains and repeatedly make love.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

The Rākṣasa woman, who could move as swiftly as thought, made love to Bhīma in place after place, and so she gave birth to Bhīma's mighty

son. His eyes were frightful, his mouth huge, his ears sharp-pointed; he was fearsome and strong, terrible to behold with his copper-coloured lips and his sharp teeth. That foe-tamer was a great Bowman, a great hero with great mettle and great arms; he had great speed and a great body, and great powers of illusion. Child of a human but not a human, terrible in speed and mighty in strength, he surpassed Piścas and other Rāksasas, as well as human beings. Though a mere child, he had reached what passes among men for manhood, lord of the peoples; brave and strong, he attained excellence with all weapons. Rākṣasa women indeed conceive and give birth on the same day; they can also assume many shapes and change their form at will.

That hairless child and mighty Bowman now bowed and touched his parents' feet, and they gave him his name: 'He is as bald as a pot,' said Bhīma to the child's mother, and so his name became Ghaṭotkaca, 'Bald as a pot'. Ghaṭotkaca loved the Pāṇḍavas, and he was always as dear to them as life itself.

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Now Hidimbā told Bhīma that their time together had run out; with his agreement she went her own way. Ghaṭotkaca, best of Rāksasas, also bade farewell and set out for the north, promising to return to his father and uncles at time of need. Indeed, noble Indra had created him on account of Karṇa's Spear: his purpose was to destroy the noble Karṇa of incomparable valour.

[144] *The Pāṇḍavas travel on, wearing the dress of ascetics, until they meet Vyāsa. He conducts them to the city of Ekacakrā, advising them to live there secretly. Then, after promising that they will attain greatness, he leaves.*

[145] *In Ekacakrā the Pāṇḍavas lodge in a Brahmin's house, sharing out the food they beg each day – one half for Bhīma, the other half for the rest of the family. One day Kuntī and Bhīma overhear the Brahmin grieving. He cannot bring himself to abandon his wife and children, who will die without him: better for them all to die together. [146] The Brahmin's wife proposes to take his place, for his son and daughter will need their father. It is possible that the Rākṣasa will let her live, as she is a woman; anyway she has led a good life. [147] Next the Brahmin's daughter argues that she is the one who should be sacrificed; then her infant brother babbles that he will kill the Rākṣasa, which brings much to the others despite their grief.*

[148] Kuntī asks the cause of their trouble, and is told that a flesh-eating Rākṣasa named Baka demands the daily provision of rice, two buffaloes and one human as his price for protecting the kingdom, which is ruled by a weak king. Now it is the Brahmin's turn, and he intends to take his entire family to Baka so that they may die together.

[149] Kuntī proposes that one of her sons should go to Baka in place of the Brahmin. He demurs, not wishing to incur the sin of causing the death of a guest whom he believes to be a Brahmin, but Kuntī reassures him: her son is powerful and will escape unharmed. Bhīma is sent to Baka.

[150] The other Pāṇḍavas return with the alms they have begged. When Yudhiṣṭhīra learns what Kuntī has done he is furious: they all depend on Bhīma. But Kuntī convinces him that Bhīma will survive, and that it is right to recompense the Brahmin for his hospitality.

[151] Bhīma takes the food to Baka. When Baka comes for it he finds Bhīma eating the food himself and ignoring the Rākṣasa. Baka attacks him, first with his hands and then with an uprooted tree, but still Bhīma takes no notice. Finally Bhīma finishes eating and joins in combat with Baka: after a fearful fight, he breaks the Rākṣasa in two. [152] Bhīma now warns the other Rākṣasas to cease harming humans, and they agree. The townspeople are amazed and delighted by Bhīma's feat.

## CITRARATHA

[153] The Pāṇḍavas continue living in Ekacakrā. A visiting Brahmin tells them stories of many lands, among them tales of Drupada, king of Pāñcāla. They ask to hear more about Drupada and his children.

[154] The Brahmin tells of Drona's miraculous birth, his friendship with Drupada and his acquisition of weapons from Rāma Jāmadagnya. He tells how Drupada had repudiated their friendship, and how Drona, after teaching the Pāṇḍavas martial skills, had instructed them to seize Drupada's kingdom. Though the southern half of the kingdom was returned to him, Drupada continued to harbour enmity towards Drona. [155] Longing for a son capable of avenging him, he encountered two seers, Yāja and Upayāja. Upayāja refused his request for the performance of a ritual to get such a son, but Yāja agreed. When he offered the oblation, a mighty young man emerged from the fire, and a voice

from the air proclaimed that he was destined to kill Drona; then a beautiful, dark girl emerged from the altar, and the voice proclaimed that she was destined to accomplish the purpose of the gods by annihilating the Kṣatriyas. They were named Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Kṛṣṇā (Draupadī).

[156] The Pāṇḍavas are greatly disturbed by this story. Kuntī suggests that they travel to Pāñcāla, and her sons agree. [157] They are visited by Vyāsa, who tells them the story of a lovelorn girl who had performed austerities to win Śiva's favour: five times she had requested him for a virtuous husband, and he had pronounced that in her next birth she would have five husbands. That girl has been reborn as Draupadī; she is destined to be the Pāṇḍavas' wife.

[158] As the Pāṇḍavas continue their journey by night, they inadvertently disturb the Gandharva king Aṅgāraparṇa Citraratha playing with his womenfolk by the Gaṅgā. He is furious, but Arjuna stands up to him, and when Aṅgāraparṇa attacks him he deploys the Fire Weapon which he had received from Drona. Aṅgāraparṇa is overcome, but Arjuna spares him; in return, the Gandharva gives up his names and grants Arjuna the power to see everything everywhere. To each Pāṇḍava he further gives a hundred Gandharva horses, and Arjuna gives him the Fire Weapon. [159] He asks the Gandharva why he attacked them, and the Gandharva answers that it was because they had with them no fires, no offerings, and, above all, no household priest: no king can succeed without a priest. In the course of his answer he repeatedly refers to Arjuna as 'son of Tapati'.

[160] Arjuna points out that he is the son of Kuntī: who is Tapati? The Gandharva tells her story. — Tapati is the daughter of the Sun, of incomparable beauty, and her father is anxiously seeking a husband for her. The Kuru king Saṃvaraṇa is a great devotee of the Sun, who decides that he should marry Tapati. Once when Saṃvaraṇa is out hunting in the mountains he sees her and falls in love; but when he asks her who she is, she vanishes, and he is unable to find her. [161] Saṃvaraṇa falls to the ground, overcome by love, whereupon Tapati reappears to him. He asks her to marry him according to the rite of the Gandharvas; she replies that

she loves him and would like to marry him, but that he must consult her father the Sun.

[162] Saṃvaraṇa propitiates the Sun and mentally summons his household priest Vasiṣṭha, who arrives on the twelfth day. [163] Vasiṣṭha intercedes with the Sun on Saṃvaraṇa's behalf, and the Sun grants his wish. Saṃvaraṇa and Tapati marry there in the mountains: for twelve years they remain there enjoying themselves, while Saṃvaraṇa's kingdom is ravaged by drought and famine. Then Vasiṣṭha brings the king and queen back to their city, and Indra grants rain once more. The son of Saṃvaraṇa and Tapati is Kuru, Arjuna's ancestor.

## VASIṢṬHA

[164] — When Arjuna has heard the story of Tapati, he asks the Gandharva to tell him about Vasiṣṭha, and the Gandharva answers by praising the great seer: Arjuna should seek such a household priest for himself. [165] Arjuna asks to hear the origin of Vasiṣṭha's dispute with Viśvāmitra, and the Gandharva narrates the story.

— Viśvāmitra is king of Kānyakubja. Once when hunting he visits Vasiṣṭha's hermitage, where he is received with great honour, and there he sees Vasiṣṭha's wish-granting cow; he offers Vasiṣṭha his kingdom for her, but Vasiṣṭha refuses. Viśvāmitra with his troops attempts to take her by force, but she creates the various barbarian peoples, who attack and overcome Viśvāmitra's forces. Recognizing that the power of a Brahmin is greater than that of a Kṣatriya, Viśvāmitra determines to become a Brahmin himself; he performs such austerities that he is able to achieve this goal.

[166] Now King Kalmāṣapāda quarrels with Vasiṣṭha's son Śakti, and strikes him; in return, Śakti curses him to eat human flesh. Viśvāmitra sees this happen, and orders a Rākṣasa to possess Kalmāṣapāda. When a Brahmin requests a dish of meat from the king, he instructs his cook to send human flesh, and is cursed a second time to wander the earth in his Śakti and, at Viśvāmitra's prompting, all Vasiṣṭha's other hundred sons. When he learns what Viśvāmitra has done, Vasiṣṭha attempts suicide,

but neither a leap from a mountain, nor fire, nor the sea, will harm him. [167] He tries to drown himself in a river and to feed himself to crocodiles, but with no better success: he realizes that he cannot die. He is delighted to learn from his son Śakti's widow Adrśyantī that she is pregnant. Then the two of them are attacked by Kalmāṣapāda.

[168] Vasiṣṭha releases Kalmāṣapāda from his possession by the Rāksasa: Kalmāṣapāda agrees henceforth to be respectful to Brahmins, and requests Vasiṣṭha to father a child on his queen. Vasiṣṭha assents. Kalmāṣapāda returns to his city, Ayodhyā, where he is greeted joyfully; Vasiṣṭha lies with the queen, who remains pregnant for twelve years and then splits open her womb with a stone. She gives birth to Aśmaka ('Stone').

## AURVA

[169] Adrśyantī gives birth to a son, Parāśara. When he calls Vasiṣṭha 'daddy', his mother tells him not to: his daddy was eaten by a Rāksasa. Parāśara, who is a great seer, resolves to destroy the entire world. In order to dissuade him, Vasiṣṭha tells him a story.

— King Kṛtavīrya is very generous to the Bhṛgu Brahmins, but after his death the Kṣatriyas, discovering that the Bhṛgus have been hoarding wealth, turn on them and kill them. One woman flees after concealing her unborn child in her thigh. She is caught by Kṣatriyas, whereupon the child bursts out of her thigh and blinds them with his brilliance. [170] They beg the child, who is named Aurva, 'Born from a Thigh', for mercy: he restores their sight and sends them away, but then begins to perform austerities to destroy the entire world. At this his ancestors appear to him to explain that they had deliberately prompted the Kṣatriya attack as a way of bringing their excessively long earthly lives to an end without incurring the penalty for suicide. They ask Aurva to abandon his destructive plan. [171] Aurva tells them that if he holds back the fire of his anger he himself will be burnt by it; none the less he is willing to do as they wished. They advise him to place the fire in the sea, and he does so: it becomes a great submarine horse's head, spitting fire and drinking water.

[172] — The young seer Parāśara now decides not to destroy the

entire world: instead he will kill all Rākṣasas in a sacrifice. Unwilling to break a second vow of his, Vasiṣṭha does not try to stop him, but the seer Pulastya, father of the Rākṣasas, persuades him to break off the sacrifice before its completion. Parāśara now casts away his fire on the northern side of the Himalaya, where it may still be seen consuming Rākṣasas, trees and even stones in season after season.

[173] — Now Arjuna asks the Gandharva why Kalmāṣapāda wished Vasiṣṭha to lie with his wife, and why Vasiṣṭha consented. The Gandharva relates the story. — After being cursed by Śakti, Kalmāṣapāda is wandering hungrily in the forest when he comes upon a Brahmin and his wife in sexual union. He catches the Brahmin and, despite his wife's pleas, eats him. The wife now curses him: he too will die if he indulges in sexual union; Vasiṣṭha will lie with his wife, and the child of that coupling will become his heir.

### DRAUPADĪ'S SVAYAMVARA

[174] Arjuna now asks the Gandharva to recommend a household priest for the Pāṇḍavas. The Gandharva recommends Dhaumya, and receives the Fire Weapon from Arjuna. Dhaumya agrees to be the Pāṇḍavas' priest; encouraged, they set off to attend Draupadī's svayamvara.

[175] As they travel, still in the guise of Brahmins, they join a party of Brahmins going to the svayamvara in hopes of rich presents. [176] On arriving in Drupada's capital, they lodge at a potter's house. Drupada announces that his daughter will be given in marriage to the man who can string a very strong bow and use it to strike a high target through a small opening, privately hoping that Arjuna may come and claim her. A great crowd gathers in the arena to observe the competition: the Pāṇḍavas sit among the Brahmins. When the time comes, Dhṛṣṭadyumna begins the proceedings. [177] He lists the names of all the Kṣatriyas who have come seeking Draupadī's hand.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[178] Decked with earrings and other ornaments, vying together one against the other, each reckoning himself the best for weapons and for

strength, the young men now rushed forward, all full of themselves. They were not short of pride in their looks and valour and high birth, their *dharma* too, and their youthful vigour; the rush of their intoxication was like that of mighty, rutting Himālayan elephants. With their bodies overwhelmed by feelings of love, they vied to stare each other down, and sprang forward from their kingly seats crying 'Draupadī Kṛṣṇā is mine!' The Kṣatriyas assembled in the arena in hopes of winning Drupada's daughter were as splendid as the hosts of the gods when they assembled to contend for Umā, daughter of the mountain king.<sup>1</sup> Their limbs were tormented with the love-god's arrows, and their hearts were given over to Draupadī; those lords of men stepped down into the arena to contend for Drupada's daughter, thinking now of even their friends as enemies.

Now the hosts of the gods arrived in their flying chariots: the Rudras, the Ādityas, the Vasus and the Aśvins, together with the Sādhyas, and all the Maruts too, all headed by Yama and Kubera god of wealth. There were demons, divine birds and mighty serpents, seers, Guhyakas and Cāraṇas, and also the leading Gandharvas Viśvāvasu, Nārada and Parvata,<sup>2</sup> together with the Apsarases. Balarāma the plough-bearer<sup>3</sup> was there, and Kṛṣṇa Keśava, along with the chiefs among the Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas. Those bull-like Yadus watched the events, in accordance with Kṛṣṇa's wishes. The hero of the Yadus himself saw five men resembling mighty, rutting elephants bearing auspicious markings, their limbs covered with ash as if they were fires, and he thought of the Pāṇḍavas. Then to Balarāma he spoke the names of Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, victorious Arjuna, and the two heroic twins; and Balarāma slowly examined those five, and then looked with satisfaction at Kṛṣṇa the stirrer of men.

Other princes, sons and grandsons of many kings, with their eyes, hearts and dispositions given over to Draupadī, strained to see her as she passed, biting their lips, their faces the colour of copper. The strong-armed sons of Kuntī too, and the heroic, noble-minded twins, were all

<sup>1</sup> Umā is a name for Pārvatī, Śiva's wife.

<sup>2</sup> Nārada is a seer, often mentioned together with Parvata, but he is also often linked with the Gandharvas, or even identified as one.

<sup>3</sup> Balarāma is Kṛṣṇa's elder brother; his weapon is a plough.

struck by the love-god's arrows as soon as they set eyes on Draupadī. The sky was thronged with seers and Gandharvas, and with divine birds, serpents, demons and Siddhas; it was filled with a heavenly fragrance and strewn with heavenly garlands; the mighty roar of drums pervaded it, and flying chariots cluttered it on every side, while it resounded with flutes and lutes and cymbals.

15 Now, one by one, all those hosts of kings displayed their valour in their efforts to win Draupadī Kṛṣṇā. But no matter what force they applied, they could not string that most strong bow: valiant lords of men were thrown down by the spring of that mighty bow till they lay writhing on the ground, crestfallen and seemingly broken in spirit. The strength of the bow reduced the circle of kings to cries of woe; it ground and smashed their armlets and earrings, and turned their hearts away from Draupadī, and left them in affliction. The folk in the crowd were bewildered, and the kings left off their boasting. Now Kuntī's son, the victorious hero Arjuna, made ready to string that bow and fix an arrow to it.

[179] After the kings had given up the task of stringing the bow, noble-minded Arjuna rose from amidst the Brahmins. When the leading priests saw Kuntī's son step forward, splendid as a rainbow, they cried out and waved their garments of antelope-skin. Some were displeased, some joyful; others, clever men who earned their living by their intelligence, said to one another, 'O priests, how can a bow that Karṇa, Śalya and other mighty princes of renown could not bend, for all their strength and skill at archery, be strung by a mere Brahmin boy, untrained in weapons and inferior in strength? If, from pride or exuberance or unsteadiness in the Brahmin way, he sets out to stretch that bow, but fails in the task for lack of forethought, Brahmins will become the butt of mockery amongst all the kings. He must be stopped; indeed, he must not go! We will not be mocked; we will not lose our dignity; we will not incur the hatred of the world's kings.'

Yet others said, 'He is a fine young man. His shoulders, arms and thighs are as stout as the trunk of a mighty elephant, and he is as steadfast as Mount Himālaya. His resolve suggests that he is capable of this task. His strength is to be so very resolute: no one would set out on such an undertaking without the strength to carry it out. And there is no task

anywhere in the three worlds that is beyond the power of Brahmins among the three classes of men; for priests of firm vows who grow weak through feeding on nothing but water, or air, or fruit, are rendered immensely strong by their brahmanical power. No Brahmin should be looked down on, whether he does right or wrong, and whether the task he faces is pleasant or unpleasant, great or small.'

But even as the priests talked, some saying one thing, some another, Arjuna stood next to the bow, unmoving as a mountain. The afflicter of it with his head, then took hold of it in joyful excitement. In the time it takes to blink, he strung it; and he took up five arrows and swiftly pierced the target through the opening. It fell to the ground. Then a roar broke out in heaven, and another great roar amongst the crowd in the arena; and Indra rained down celestial flowers upon the head of Kuntī's son, slayer of his enemies. On every side folk waved their garments, or else cried in woe, while flowers rained down all about them from the sky. Musicians blew trumpets in hundreds, and hosts of Sūta and Māgadha bards sang sweet songs of praise.

When Drupada, slayer of his enemies, saw Arjuna's feat, he was delighted, and he made ready to offer him the assistance of his troops. But when that mighty roar began, Yudhiṣṭhīra, most excellent upholder of *dharma*, set off quickly for his dwelling with the twins, those highest lords. Meanwhile, Draupadī Kṛṣṇā, seeing that the target had been pierced, and observing that Arjuna resembled Indra himself, took up a splendid white garland and went smilingly up to Kuntī's son. He had won her in the arena; now he accepted her to the applause of the Brahmins. Then, having achieved the unthinkable, he left the arena, and she followed him as his wife.

[180] *Drupada is attacked by the Kṣatriyas, who are furious that Draupadī should be given to a Brahmin. Bhīma and Arjuna go to his defence, Bhīma uprooting a tree to serve as a staff. Kṛṣṇa again tells Balarāma that these men must be the Pāṇḍavas.* [181] *The Kṣatriyas are led by Karna, who does battle against Arjuna. Surprised that a Brahmin should fight so well, Karna asks Arjuna whether he is not in fact Indra or Viṣṇu in disguise; when Arjuna assures him that he is really a Brahmin, Karna withdraws from the fight. Meanwhile*

15

20

MĀHĀBHĀGAVAT  
Bhīma fights Salya,<sup>1</sup> whom he hurls to the ground. At this the Kṣatriyas give up and leave; Arjuna and Bhīma now return with Draupadī to where Kuntī has been anxiously awaiting them.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[182] When Kuntī's two noble-minded sons reached the potter's workshop where their mother was, those foremost of heroes, full of great joy, told her about Draupadī: 'We have won alms!' But Kuntī was inside the hut; she could not see her sons, and called out, 'All of you share equally!' Only then did she see the girl, and exclaimed, 'Alas for my words!'

Draupadī remained full of great joy, but Kuntī was fearful of breaching *dharma* and ashamed. She took Draupadī by the hand, approached Yudhiṣṭhira, and said, 'My son, my king, here is the daughter of King Drupada. Your younger brothers presented her to me, and I without thinking said, as I so often do, "Share equally!" Bull among Kurus, tell me how my words may not be falsified today, and how the daughter of the king of Pāñcāla may not be touched by an unprecedented breach of *dharma*.'

King Yudhiṣṭhira of mightiest power considered for a moment. Then the hero of the Kurus comforted his mother Kuntī, and spoke as follows to wealth-winner Arjuna: 'Draupadī was won by you, O Pāñdava, and in you the princess shall find her happiness. Let fire be lit; let offerings be made; take her hand according to the proper rite!'

But Arjuna answered, 'Lord of men, do not make me party to wrongdoing. This is not that *dharma* to which others adhere. You, sir, should marry first, and then strong-armed Bhīma who achieves the unthinkable; then I myself, and after me Nakula; and finally Sahadeva son of Mādrī. But the wolf-belly and I and the twins, O king, and this girl too, are all subject to you; so you should decide what is to be done in this matter to conform to *dharma* and preserve our good name, and also to please the king of Pāñcāla, and then carry it out. Tell us your decision: we are all under your authority.'

When the brothers saw Draupadī Kṛṣṇā of high repute standing there,

- The King of the Madras and brother of Pāñdu's second wife Mādrī.

they kept looking at each other. All of them took her to their hearts, for as those heroes of boundless power gazed at Draupadī, love made its presence felt and threw their senses into confusion. Indeed, the creator himself had fashioned her lovely form to captivate all creatures as no other woman.

Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhīra saw their expressions and understood their feelings; and remembering too, bull-like hero, everything that Vyāsa had said, the king now spoke to his brothers, fearful of discord among them: 'Beautiful Draupadī shall be the wife of us all!' 15

[183] Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma now arrive. Kṛṣṇa congratulates the Pāṇḍavas on their good fortune so far and wishes them well for the future; then he and his brother leave quickly, to avoid giving them away.

[184] Dhṛṣṭadyumna, unobserved, watches the Pāṇḍavas. He sees that his sister is being properly treated, and hears them tell heroic tales to one another. Then he returns to Drupada, who is anxious to know who it is that has taken his daughter. [185] Dhṛṣṭadyumna describes what he has seen, and assures his father that the mysterious strangers are indeed the Pāṇḍavas. Delighted, Drupada sends his household priest to them with an invitation to declare themselves openly. Yudhiṣṭhīra pays his respects, and answers that Drupada need feel no concern, for Draupadī was properly won. At this point a second messenger arrives from Drupada to announce that the wedding feast is ready.

[186] The Pāṇḍavas ride to Drupada's palace in the chariots he has provided. Here they find a great range of goods laid out by Drupada in an attempt to discover more about his guests. They eat kingly food and take up weapons, ignoring all the other items. Drupada now comes to pay them his respects. [187] He asks Yudhiṣṭhīra to resolve his doubts by identifying himself and his companions: as soon as he does so, the wedding will proceed. Yudhiṣṭhīra now informs him that they are the Pāṇḍavas; Drupada is overcome with joy, and promises Yudhiṣṭhīra to restore his kingdom. But when he learns of Yudhiṣṭhīra's intention that Draupadī should wed all five Pāṇḍava brothers he is dismayed.

At this point Vyāsa arrives. [188] Drupada asks Vyāsa's advice about the proposed marriage, and Vyāsa asks each person for his view. Drupada himself regards it as improper; his son Dhṛṣṭadyumna is uncertain; Yudhiṣṭhīra and Kuntī both maintain that it is perfectly right. Vyāsa agrees with Yudhiṣṭhīra and takes Drupada aside to explain to him how this can be.

## THE FIVE INDRAS

[189] Vyāsa tells Drupada how the gods once performed a sacrifice in the Naimiṣa forest. Yama was busy in his sacrificial duties, with the result that creatures no longer died. The gods complained to Brahmā that nothing now distinguished them from men; Brahmā reassured them that once their rite was completed men would start to die again. As the gods returned to their sacrifice, Indra saw a woman weeping into the Gaṅgā: each of her tears became a golden lotus. When he asked her who she was and why she was weeping, she told him to follow her; he did so, and saw a youth playing dice with some young women. The youth ignored him; Indra began to bluster angrily, but at a glance from the youth he found himself paralysed. Next the youth, who was Śiva, told the woman to bring him close so that he could be divested of his pride, and at her touch he collapsed to the ground. Now he was commanded to remove the summit of the mountain and enter, and when he did so he found four other Indras imprisoned there. When Indra begged for his freedom, Śiva told him that all five Indras would return to their own world only after being born as men. However, he agreed to their stipulation that in their human form they must be begotten by deities: Dharma, Wind, Indra and the Aśvins. He also promised that the goddess Śrī would take human form as their wife. Nārāyaṇa agreed to this arrangement, and plucked from his head one white and one black hair: these entered the wombs of Rohiṇī and Devakī, and from them were born Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa. — Vyāsa explains to Drupada that the Pāṇḍavas are the five Indras, and Draupadī is Śrī, and he grants Drupada a sight of their true forms. He also repeats the tale he had earlier told the Pāṇḍavas of the girl who five times asked Śiva for a husband and was granted five husbands in her next birth. Draupadī is both Śrī and the reincarnation of this girl: it is ordained that she should marry the five Pāṇḍavas.

## THE WEDDING

[190] Drupada now drops his objections, and the wedding proceeds. Dhaumya marries Draupadī to each of the Pāṇḍava brothers, one on each of five successive

days; her virginity is restored each time. Drupada bestows costly presents upon the bridegrooms. [191] Kuntī gives Draupadī her blessing, and Kṛṣṇa sends the Pāṇḍavas rich gifts.

## THE COMING OF VIDURA

[192] When word gets about that the Pāṇḍavas are alive and wedded to Drupada's daughter, there is joy among Kṣatriyas in general but gloom among the Dhṛtarāṣṭras. Vidura communicates the good news to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who takes him to mean that Draupadī has chosen Duryodhana for her husband. When he learns that it is the Pāṇḍavas who have married her, and that they have formed many new alliances, he is pleased; but Karṇa and Duryodhana urge that action must swiftly be taken against them.

[193] Duryodhana proposes guile: by one devious means or another the Pāṇḍavas should be set against one another or killed. [194] Karṇa disagrees: deceit against the Pāṇḍavas has been attempted before, and has failed; and both the Pāṇḍavas themselves and their new allies the Pāñcālas are firmly committed to one another. Instead, Karṇa suggests an early war against them, before they have had a chance to form further alliances, and in particular before Kṛṣṇa can come to their aid. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is impressed by this argument, but wishes to consult the elders.

[195] Bhīṣma is strongly opposed to Karṇa's plan, which is contrary to dharma. Dhṛtarāṣṭra has already tarnished his name through his earlier attempt to have the Pāṇḍavas killed; the only right course of action now is to give them half the kingdom.

[196] Drona shares Bhīṣma's view: the Pāṇḍavas should be conciliated and welcomed back to receive their rightful due. But Karṇa rounds on Bhīṣma and Drona; he tells the story of a worthless king who relied for everything upon his minister. That minister took control of the king's wealth, his womenfolk, and his authority, but, for all he desired it, he was unable to usurp the kingship itself, for kingship is ordained. Dhṛtarāṣṭra should heed all counsel, wicked as well as virtuous. Drona rebukes Karṇa, and foresees the destruction of the Kurus if Dhṛtarāṣṭra follows his advice.

[197] Now Vidura commends the counsel of Bhīṣma and Drona to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He should not favour his own sons over the sons of Pāṇḍu; even if he

chooses to do so, he will not benefit, for the Pāṇḍavas are invincible. Dhṛitarāṣṭra should seek to restore his good name by pursuing reconciliation.

[198] Dhṛitarāṣṭra is convinced by the arguments of Bhūṣma, Drona and Vidura, and sends Vidura as an ambassador to the Pāṇḍavas to honour them and request their return. Vidura does as he is bidden. Treating Drupada and the Pāṇḍavas with the greatest respect, he urges that the five brothers should return to Hāstīnapura with Kuntī and Draupadī.

### THE GAINING OF THE KINGDOM

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[199] Drupada said, 'It is just as you now tell me, wise Vidura; and I share your great joy, lord, at the forging of this alliance. It is right for these noble princes to return home. However, it would not be right for me to say this to them myself. The Pāṇḍavas should not set out till brave Yudhiṣṭhira, Kuntī's son, thinks fit, and Bhīma and Arjuna too, and the bull-like twins, and also the tiger-like heroes Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, who know *dharma* and are committed to the princes' welfare.'

Yudhiṣṭhira now addressed Kṛṣṇa, and said, 'O king, I and all who follow me are in your hands. Whatever you are pleased to say, that we shall do.'

Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva replied, 'I think it right to go; but I defer to the view of King Drupada, who is expert in *dharma*.'

Then Drupada spoke again: 'I completely agree with strong-armed Kṛṣṇa, the heroic prince of Daśārha and highest lord, that the time has come. For, make no doubt, the noble sons of Pāṇḍu are as dear to Vāsudeva as they have now become to me; even Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhira, son of Dharma, does not devote as much thought to the princes' welfare as the tiger-like hero Kṛṣṇa Keśava!'

Now that they had noble Drupada's leave to depart, the Pāṇḍavas, with Kṛṣṇa and sagacious Vidura, collected Draupadī Kṛṣṇā and Kuntī of high repute, and travelled pleasantly and at leisure to the City of the Elephant, Hāstīnapura. When the Kaurava ruler Dhṛitarāṣṭra learnt that those heroes were approaching, he dispatched his sons to greet the Pāṇḍavas, together with the mighty Bowman Vikarṇa.

Citrasena, Drona the mightiest of bowmen, and Kṛpa heir of Gotama. Surrounded by this welcoming party, the heroic chariot-fighters now made a stately and resplendent entrance into the city of Hāstinapura.

The city-folk were bursting with curiosity to see those tiger-like heroes, destroyers of grief and affliction, and the Pāṇḍavas heard many kind and heart-warming words uttered by well-wishers: 'Here comes the tiger-like hero Yudhiṣṭhira, expert in *dharma*, returning to protect us through *dharma* as if we were his children! Today is as if the great king Pāṇḍu had returned from the forest he loved in order to work for our welfare, make no doubt! Surely our happiness today is complete, since the brave sons of Kuntī have returned to govern us all. If we have gained any merit through generosity, sacrifice or asceticism, let it serve to keep the Pāṇḍavas in our city for a hundred autumns!'

Now they paid their respects at the feet of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma, and others deserving of honour; then, after exchanging polite greetings with all the city elders, they entered Dhṛtarāṣṭra's house as he directed.

For some time the mighty, noble Pāṇḍavas rested there; then they were summoned by King Dhṛtarāṣṭra and by Bhīṣma son of Śamtanu. Dhṛtarāṣṭra addressed them: 'Son of Kuntī, hear with your brothers what I have to say. Let there be no further discord! You should move to Khāṇḍavaprastha; no one will be able to harm you if you make your dwelling there, for Arjuna will protect you as Indra protects the gods. Receive half of the kingdom, and move to Khāṇḍavaprastha!'

Those bull-like men all accepted the king's words. They bowed to him, and set out for the terrible forest; they received half of the kingdom, and moved to Khāṇḍavaprastha.

When the invincible Pāṇḍavas arrived there, led by Kṛṣṇa, they turned that forest into a town, beautiful as a heaven. At an auspicious place and time the mighty chariot-fighters proclaimed a peace, and then measured out their city under Vyāsa's leadership. They adorned it with moats that seemed like seas, and provided it with a wall standing so high that it enclosed the heavens, like a white cloud, or Mount Himālaya; thus their fine city shone like Bhogavatī, the city of the

serpents. For protection it had fearsome double gates like Garuḍa's wings, and gateway towers, tall as massed clouds or Mount Mandara itself, that were filled with weapons of every kind, complete and well guarded. It was well stocked with spears like fork-tongued snakes, and watch-towers stood round it at close intervals; the adornments of that excellent fortress were elephant-goads, hundred-slaying weapons and many other such instruments of war, including huge discuses of iron.

Its streets were wide and well laid out to avoid accidents, and a variety of fine white dwellings added to its lustre. And so that city, known as Indraprastha, shone like Indra's heaven, and grew like a massive lightning-cloud in the sky. In that lovely place, Yudhiṣṭhīra heir of Kuru set his dwelling, glittering with wealth like the realm of Kubera, treasurer to the gods. Brahmins, best of all those who know the Veda, came to Indraprastha, O king, and similarly experts in every language liked to live there; merchants seeking to trade came to the land from every direction, and craftsmen of every sort arrived to settle there too. All round the city were lovely gardens planted with mango trees, plum trees and neems, *āśoka* trees and *campakas*, and many other kinds of tree, always in blossom and always in fruit, full of many varieties of birds, and resounding with the intoxicated cries of peacocks and of cuckoos..

There were houses bright as mirrors; there were many arbours of creepers; there were entrancing painted houses, pleasure-hills, and many pools filled with purest water; there were lakes of great loveliness, fragrant with red and blue lotuses and stocked with geese, ducks and *cakravāka* birds; there were delightful lotus ponds of every kind, surrounded by trees, as well as huge and beautiful reservoirs. The land was great, and populated by good folk; living there, great king, the Pāṇḍavas experienced an ever-increasing joy.

So it was that, after Bhīṣma and King Dhṛitarāṣṭra had reached a just settlement, the Pāṇḍavas came to dwell in Khāṇḍavaprastha. Ruled by those five mighty bowmen as if by five Indras, that fine city shone like Bhogavatī, the city of the serpents. Once he had settled them there, O king, heroic Kṛṣṇa Keśava took his leave of the Pāṇḍavas and returned with Balarāma to Dvārakā.

[200] — Janamejaya asks Vaiśampāyana how the Pāṇḍavas avoided disputes over their joint wife Draupadī, and Vaiśampāyana continues his narration. — Yudhiṣṭhīra and his brothers rule righteously and in happiness. One day the seer Nārada arrives. He is greeted respectfully, and blesses Draupadī; then he dismisses her, and warns the brothers to avoid falling into dispute over her; it was this that led to the death of the demon brothers Sunda and Upasunda. Yudhiṣṭhīra asks to hear this tale in full.

## SUNDA AND UPASUNDA

[201] Nārada narrates the story. — Sunda and Upasunda, inseparable brothers, have performed such fierce austerities that the gods try to disrupt them, but without success. Finally, Brahmā offers them a boon: they choose mighty strength, the ability to change shape at will, and immortality. When Brahmā rules out immortality, they choose invulnerability except to each other, and rejoin the other demons. [202] Now they embark on conquering the world. The gods flee to Brahmā's world, and the demon brothers overcome all creatures; taking the forms of fierce animals they slay seers, Brahmins and kings until the earth is laid completely waste. Then they settle in Kurukṣetra.

[203] The highest divine seers approach Brahmā and tell him what has occurred; after pausing briefly for thought, Brahmā orders Viśvakarman to create a highly desirable woman. Viśvakarman assembles all the loveliest materials in the three worlds and from them forms Tilottamā. At Brahmā's command, Tilottamā agrees to seduce the demon brothers. As she circumambulates the gods before leaving, only Śiva and Indra seem unaffected by her beauty; but three new faces grow on the sides and back of Śiva's head, and eyes grow all over Indra's body.

[204] Sunda and Upasunda are spending their time in drunken enjoyment when Tilottamā appears before them. Both are instantly infatuated, and in the quarrel that ensues they attack each other with their clubs and kill each other. — After hearing this story from Nārada, the