

15 whole world, down to the children, favouring him, heir of Kuru; and he had seen the unsurpassed greatness of the noble Pāṇḍavas. Now Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son Duryodhana grew pale, and he travelled on, distracted with brooding on the hall and the matchless fortune of the wise lord of *dharma*. So preoccupied was Duryodhana then that he said not a word to Subala's son Śakuni, who kept trying to engage him in talk. Finally, perceiving his state of distraction, Śakuni said, 'Duryodhana, why do you sigh as you travel?'

20 Duryodhana answered him: 'I have seen this whole earth obedient to Yudhiṣṭhīra's will, conquered for him by noble Arjuna with the prowess of his weapons; I have seen, uncle, that sacrifice of Kuntī's son which matched the sacrifice of Indra among the gods; and I am so full of resentment that I burn day and night, like a shallow lake drying out at the onset of the hot weather. Observe Śīsupāla slain by the Sātvata chief, and not a man there to support him! The kings were all burning with a Pāṇḍava flame and forgave that crime; yet who could truly forgive it? What Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva did was a great wrong, and it came about through the might of the noble Pāṇḍavas.'

25 'What is more, all the kings approached Kuntī's son King Yudhiṣṭhīra bearing jewels of every kind, like Vaiśyas paying taxes! I have seen Pāṇḍu's son enjoying such dazzling fortune, and I burn with resentment, for I am unused to such sights. I shall enter fire, or swallow poison, or drown myself, for I cannot live so! What man of mettle in this world could bear to see his rivals prosper and himself fail? If today I tolerate this new-found fortune of my rival, then I am neither woman nor non-woman, neither man nor non-man! What man like me would not burn to see such sovereignty over the earth, such wealth, such a sacrifice? But alone I am powerless to gain that kingly fortune for myself, and I see no allies; that is why I contemplate death. It seems to me that fate is supreme and human effort vain,¹ when I see that Kuntī's son has gained such a splendid fortune.'

¹ The terms translated 'fate' and 'human effort', *daiva* and *pauruṣa*, are parallel formations often contrasted with each other: *daiva* is 'the will of the gods' (*deva*), *pauruṣa* 'the will of a man' (*puruṣa*).

35 'Once before¹ I strove for his destruction, son of Subala, and yet he overcame it all, and thrives like a lotus in water. And so it seems to me that fate is supreme and human effort vain, for Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons are failing and the sons of Kuntī always thrive! I have seen their fortune and their splendid hall; I have seen their guards deride me; and I burn as if with fire. So let me be, uncle, for today I am full of woe. But you may tell Dhṛtarāṣṭra that resentment has taken possession of me.'

[44] Śakuni replied, 'Duryodhana, do not be angry with Yudhiṣṭhīra, for Pāṇḍu's sons always enjoy good fortune. More than once before now you have taken them captive with a variety of schemes, but through their good fortune the tiger-like heroes have escaped. They have gained Draupadi for their wife, and Drupada together with his sons for their friends; and heroic Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva is their ally in gaining mastery over the earth. They inherited unchallenged wealth from their father, lord of the earth, and have increased it through their ardour. What grounds for grief in this? Wealth-winner Arjuna satisfied the Fire god, and gained the bow Gāndīva with two inexhaustible arrow-cases, and celestial weapons also;² with that wonderful bow and the prowess of his own arm he has brought the lords of the earth under his authority. What grounds for grief in this? That ambidextrous enemy-afflicter freed the demon Maya from Fire's burning and so brought about the construction of the hall;³ at Maya's command, that hall was supported by terrible Kimkara Rākṣasas.⁴ What grounds for grief in this?

10 'As for the lack of allies of which you spoke, heir of Bharata, that is not so, for these mighty chariot-fighters your brothers are your allies; and so is the great Bowman Drona with his wise son Aśvatthāman; and Karna the Sūta's son, and the great chariot-fighter Kṛpa heir of Gotama; and I myself with my brothers, and Somadatta's son Bhūriśravas. Join together with all these, and conquer the whole earth!'

'Together with you, O king,' said Duryodhana, 'and with these other mighty chariot-fighters, I shall defeat them, if you think it good. And

¹ See 1.129–38.

² See 1.214–16, 225.

³ See 1.219, 2.1.

⁴ See 2.3.

once they are defeated, the earth shall be mine, and all the lords of the earth, and that costly hall!'

15 Sakuni answered, 'Wealth-winner Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, Bhīma, Yudhiṣṭhīra, Nakula, Sahadeva, Drupada with his sons – these cannot be defeated in battle by force, not even by the hosts of the gods, for they are great chariot-fighters and mighty bowmen, expert in arms and mad for battle. But I know the means by which Yudhiṣṭhīra himself may be defeated, O king: listen, and approve it!'

'If they can indeed be defeated without recklessness towards friends and other noble supporters,' replied Duryodhana, 'then tell me, uncle!'

20 Sakuni said, 'Kuntī's son is fond of gambling, but he does not know how to play. If the lord of kings is challenged, he will not be able to refuse; and I am skilled at playing – I have no equal on earth, none in the three worlds. So challenge Kuntī's son to a match. Thanks to my skill at dice, bull-like king, you may be sure that I shall take for you his kingdom and his splendid fortune! But you must tell the king about all this, Duryodhana; once I have your father's consent, I shall defeat him, make no doubt.'

'Son of Subala,' answered Duryodhana, 'you should tell the Kuru lord Dhṛtarāṣṭra yourself in the proper manner; I cannot talk of this to him.'

5 [45] Śakuni son of Subala had experienced the great rite of King Yudhiṣṭhīra's royal consecration in company with Gāndhārī's son Dur-yodhana; now, wishing to favour Duryodhana, whose opinion he had already learnt and whose words he had listened to, he approached Dhṛtarāṣṭra who saw through his wisdom as the wise lord of men sat before him, and spoke to him: 'Great king, Duryodhana has become pale, wan and thin; you should know that he is downcast and anxious, bull-like heir of Bharata; and yet you do not properly investigate the unbearable grief that an enemy is causing your eldest son! Why do you not find out about it?'

'Duryodhana, my son,' cried Dhṛtarāṣṭra, 'what troubles you so deeply? If it is a matter that would be proper for me to hear, then tell me of it, heir of Kuru! Śakuni here says that you are pale, wan and thin, and yet even when I set my mind to it I can see no cause for you to grieve: all our mighty sovereignty is invested in you, son, and neither your

brothers nor your allies act to displease you. You wear fine clothes, you eat meat stews, noble horses bear you: why are you wan and thin? You have costly beds and lovely women, fine houses and every enjoyment you could wish. All this is at your call, as you well know, as though you were a god, and yet one so unconquerable seems downcast. Why are you grieving, son?'

10 'I eat this and I wear that,' answered Duryodhana, 'like any base-born man; but I harbour a fierce resentment as I endure the reversal of my fortune. The unforbearing man who, to free himself of his enemy's vexations, would destroy his own kingdom if it fell to the enemy – he is truly a man! Contentment destroys good fortune, heir of Bharata, and so do self-regard, compassion and fear; the one whom these affect will attain nothing great. Those pleasures of mine please me no more, for I have seen Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhīra enjoying such dazzling fortune, and it strikes the colour from my face! I see my rivals prosper and myself fail; I see, though I cannot bear to see, the fortune of Kuntī's son rising before me; and so I am pale and downcast, wan and thin.'

15 20 'There are eighty-eight thousand pious householders, performers of the domestic rites, whom Yudhiṣṭhīra maintains with thirty slave-girls apiece; ten thousand more daily eat the finest food from golden vessels in his dwelling; the king of Kāmboja has sent him skins of *kadali* deer, black, brown and red, and blankets of the highest quality; she-elephants, cows and horses in their hundreds and thousands roam his lands, as well as three thousand she-camels; and at the start of his splendid rite princes brought masses of jewels of every kind to Kuntī's son, lord of the earth. I have never seen nor even heard of such wealth as came to Pāṇḍu's wise son at his sacrifice! Now that I have seen my enemy receive that boundless torrent of wealth, O king, I find no comfort, for I can think of nothing else.'

25 'Vātadāna Brahmins, rich in cattle, stood in hundreds at his gate, bearing offerings worth thirty billion, but were refused; they gained entrance only when they brought their offerings in the form of lovely golden water-pots. The ocean itself brought for him Varuṇa's drinking-vessel, which even the women of the celestials do not use when they carry mead to Indra; it was cast from a thousand pieces of gold and adorned with many jewels, and when I saw it, I felt as though I were

utterly consumed by fever. Bearing that goblet, the Pāṇḍavas now travel to the oceans of the east and south; bearing it, they travel likewise to that of the west; but no one travels to that of the north, father, except for birds.

30 'And a marvel occurred there: hear me as I tell you of it. Whenever a full hundred thousand Brahmins were being served their food, there was an established signal: a conch was always blown. Heir of Bharata, I heard the glorious sound of that conch sounding again and again, till the hair rose on my body! The hall was filled with numerous princes who had come to watch – and, lord of men, those princes brought with them all manner of jewels – but at the sacrifice of Pāṇḍu's wise son those lords of the earth waited like Vaiśyas on the Brahmins, great king!

35 'Indra the king of the gods does not have such a fortune; neither does Yama or Varuṇa; not even Kubera, lord of the Guhyakas and god of wealth, has the fortune Yudhiṣṭhira has, O king. Now that I have seen the matchless wealth of Pāṇḍu's son, I have no peace, for my mind is on fire!'

Now Śakuni spoke. 'Hero of true valour, listen while I tell you the way to acquire the wonderful fortune you have seen in the hands of Pāṇḍu's son. I am known throughout the whole earth for my skill at dice, heir of Bharata: I know their inner secrets, I know how to wager, I know the subtleties of the game. Kuntī's son is fond of gambling, but he does not know how to play; if he is challenged, he is sure to come. Challenge him to gamble with you!'

When King Duryodhana heard Śakuni's words he spoke at once to 40 Dhṛtarāṣṭra: 'Here is a skilled gamester, O king, who can get me the fortune of Pāṇḍu's son through gambling: please permit it!'

Dhṛtarāṣṭra replied, 'I act on the counsel of my wise minister, Vidura the chamberlain. I shall decide this matter after consulting him, for he respects *dharma* and is far-sighted; he will announce a decision that secures the greatest good and is proper for both parties.'

'If the chamberlain is consulted,' retorted Duryodhana, 'he will prevent you; and if you are prevented, lord of kings, I shall die, make no doubt! And when I am dead, king, enjoy yourself with Vidura; for you will rule the whole earth – what need will you have of me?'

45 Dhṛtarāṣṭra listened to Duryodhana's frank and tortured words, and

then he spoke to his servants in accordance with his wishes: 'Let craftsmen swiftly build me a great hall, delightful and lovely to see, with thousands of pillars and hundreds of doors! Strew it with jewels; lay out dice everywhere; and when it is properly built, with a fine entrance, come and inform me privately.' Then, after taking this decision in order to calm Duryodhana, Dhṛtarāṣṭra the lord of the earth sent for Vidura, O king; for without asking Vidura he never decided anything. He knew the evils of gambling, and yet he was swayed by love for his son.

When wise Vidura heard what he had done and understood that the gates of Kali¹ were at hand, and that Destruction had shown its face, he hurried to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Brother approached noble firstborn brother; he bowed his head to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's feet and spoke. 'I cannot applaud this resolve of yours, O king! My lord, act to prevent gambling from causing discord among your sons.'

'Chamberlain,' answered Dhṛtarāṣṭra, 'my sons will not quarrel with my sons; the gods in heaven will bestow their favour on us, make no doubt! Whether it be fair or foul, whether it be good or ill, let this friendly gambling match proceed, for so it is ordained, make no doubt! I myself shall be near at hand, and also Bhīṣma, Bharata's bull-like heir, so there will surely be no misconduct even at fate's decree. Mount your chariot with its horses swift as the wind and go this very day to Khāṇḍavaprastha; fetch Yudhiṣṭhira here! I tell you this, Vidura: my resolve cannot be countermanded. It seems to me that fate is supreme, to bring this about!'

Wise Vidura heard him. Thinking, 'All is lost!' he went in utter misery to the river's son, Bhīṣma of mighty wisdom.

[46] — Janamejaya requests to hear the story again in greater detail, and Vaiśampāyana obliges. — Dhṛtarāṣṭra knows that Vidura will oppose the gambling match, and tells Duryodhana to abandon the idea; then he asks him why he is so dissatisfied. Duryodhana answers by describing the tremendous wealth that came in tribute to Yudhiṣṭhira, and the humiliations he himself underwent in Indraprastha. [47] He lists in detail the wonderful treasures that Yudhiṣṭhira received from all over the world: [48] in many cases kings were refused

¹ See 1.61.80 and note.

entrance despite having brought costly gifts. Great numbers of Brahmins were lavishly fed. [49] Yudhiṣṭhīra was waited on by kings, and kings brought him the chariot, armour and other items needed for the royal consecration. The sound of hundreds of conches being blown at the culmination of the ritual was so great that all the kings fainted, save for the Pāṇḍavas themselves and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Sātyaki and Kṛṣṇa, who all laughed at the sight. Now that he has seen all this, Duryodhana has no peace of mind.

[50] Dhṛtarāṣṭra appeals to Duryodhana to be satisfied with what he has, and to abide by his dharma: this is the only way to find happiness. But Duryodhana counters that a Kṣatriya should further his own interests, whether this involves dharma or adharma; he wishes to be dissatisfied, for dissatisfaction leads to fortune. He cites the deception by means of which Indra slew Namuci:¹ enemies who prosper must be destroyed.

[51] Śakuni now makes his proposal to divest Yudhiṣṭhīra of his fortune by means of gambling, rather than war; Duryodhana supports him; Dhṛtarāṣṭra says that he wishes to consult Vidura. Duryodhana objects: Vidura is not well disposed towards him. Reluctantly, Dhṛtarāṣṭra agrees to the plan. He orders the building of the hall, and instructs Vidura to fetch Yudhiṣṭhīra. Vidura disapproves, but Dhṛtarāṣṭra stands firm.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[52] Now, with his thoroughbred horses, swift, powerful and well broken-in, Vidura set forth against his will to meet the wise Pāṇḍavas, for King Dhṛtarāṣṭra had so commanded him. He raced along the road towards them, reached King Yudhiṣṭhīra's city, and entered, to be greeted with honour by the Brahmins; arriving at the royal palace, opulent as the palace of Kubera, righteous Vidura of mighty wisdom approached Dharma's son Yudhiṣṭhīra. Noble Yudhiṣṭhīra Ajātaśatru,² the truly steadfast king, welcomed Vidura with all proper honour, and then asked him about Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons. 'Chamberlain, your heart seems empty of joy. I trust that you have come on pleasant business? and that the old king's sons do his bidding? and that his people too are obedient to his will?'

¹ See 9.42.

² See 2.12.8.

'The noble king is well, and so are his sons,' replied Vidura; 'he is ever surrounded by his Indra-like kin, and his sons please him with their courteous behaviour. Nothing causes him grief, O king: he has inner strength and contentment. However, the king of the Kurus addresses you thus, having first enquired after your eternal welfare: "Come, son, and see the hall of your Dhṛtarāṣṭra brothers, which matches your own hall in loveliness! Come with your brothers, son of Kuntī, and enjoy a friendly gambling match in it. Your arrival would cause us joy, good sir, and all the Kurus are assembled ready!" Noble King Dhṛtarāṣṭra has installed gamesters there, and there you will see them assembled, cheats that they are. It is to tell you this that I have come: grant your approval, king!'

'Chamberlain,' answered Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'if we gamble, we shall quarrel; knowing this, who would agree to a match? But what do you consider proper, sir? All of us shall be ruled by your decision.'

Vidura said, 'I know that gambling brings disaster, and I tried to prevent it, but the king sent me to you. You have heard what I say, and you are learned; act for the best.'

'Apart from King Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, what other cheating gamblers will play there?' asked Yudhiṣṭhīra. 'Tell me what I ask: who are these assembled hundreds against whom I shall have to play?'

'Lord of the peoples, there is Śakuni, king of Gāndhāra,' replied Vidura. 'He plays for the highest stakes; he has skilful hands, and knows the ways of the dice. Also there are Vivīṁśati and King Citrasena, as well as Satyavrata, Purumitra and Jaya.'

'The most dangerous cheats are assembled there,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'men who gamble under the guise of trickery. But, as people say, this whole world is under the sway of what fate ordains, and today I have no option but to gamble against cheats. I do not wish, wise sir, to refuse to go to the match, since it is commanded by King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. A father is always dear to a son, and so I shall act as you instruct me, Vidura. I shall not gamble against my will with Śakuni unless he is so bold as to challenge me in that hall; but if I am challenged, I shall never refuse, for such is the eternal vow that I have sworn.'

After speaking thus to Vidura, Yudhiṣṭhīra lord of *dharma* commanded all arrangements for the journey to be swiftly made. On the following

day he set out with his followers and companions, together with the womenfolk, Draupadī chief among them. 'Fate robs us of wisdom as a sudden glare robs us of sight; man is bound as if by snares, and follows the dictate of destiny!' With these words King Yudhiṣṭhīra set forth with Vidura the chamberlain, for Kuntī's foe-taming son could not withstand that challenge. Pāṇḍu's son, the slayer of enemy heroes, mounted the chariot that Bāhlika had given him and travelled surrounded by his brothers, blazing with royal glory, with Brahmins in the van, for he was challenged by Dhṛtarāṣṭra and by his compact with fate.

Reaching Hāstīnapura, he went to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's dwelling, where the righteous Pāṇḍava met Dhṛtarāṣṭra; the lord also met Drona, Bhīṣma, Karna and Kṛpa, as was proper, as well as Aśvatthāman, Drona's son. Then the strong-armed hero met Somadatta, Duryodhana, Śalya and Śakuni son of Subala, and all the other kings who had already assembled there, together with Jayadratha and all the Kurus.

Now strong-armed Yudhiṣṭhīra, encircled by his brothers, entered the dwelling of wise King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. There he saw Queen Gāndhārī, so devoted to her husband, ever surrounded by her daughters-in-law as the Rohinī constellation is surrounded by stars; he paid Gāndhārī his respects and received her greeting. Next he saw the aged lord, father Dhṛtarāṣṭra who saw through his wisdom; the king kissed him on the head, and then kissed the other four Pāṇḍavas, beginning with Bhīma. There was joy among the Kauravas, lord of the peoples, to see the handsome, tiger-like Pāṇḍavas.

Next, with Dhṛtarāṣṭra's leave, they entered their jewelled quarters, where visitors came to see Draupadī and the other women; when the daughters-in-law of Dhṛtarāṣṭra saw the mighty, splendid wealth of Drupada's daughter they were not well pleased. After conversing with the ladies, all the tiger-like heroes left to perform their daily exercises and their toilet; then, their daily tasks completed, they perfumed themselves with heavenly sandalwood and had blessings spoken by benevolent Brahmins; and after this those heirs of Kuru ate a delicious meal and retired to their lodgings, where their womenfolk sang them to sleep. The night passed pleasantly for them in the enjoyment of love, and when the time came, well rested, they cast off sleep to the strains of songs in their praise. Thus all of them spent an agreeable night. In the

morning they completed their daily tasks, and then entered the lovely hall, which was thronged with gamblers.

[53] Now Śakuni addressed Yudhiṣṭhīra. 'The hall has been made ready, king, and everyone here is impatient to play. Let us agree to throw the dice and gamble, Yudhiṣṭhīra!'

'Gambling is deceit,' answered Yudhiṣṭhīra; 'it is evil, and there is no Kṣatriya valour or moral firmness in it. Why do you praise gambling, O king? No one has praise for the cheating gambler's pride in his deceit! So do not defeat me viciously and dishonestly, Śakuni.'

Śakuni replied, 'The calculating man who knows the ways of deception, whose cunning never falters in his struggles with the dice, and who has the intelligence to understand gambling: he is the man who emerges unscathed from the match. You fear that wagering with dice will ruin you utterly: this is why you say, "It is fate!" Put aside your misgivings and gamble with us, prince; lay your stake, do not delay!'

'Hear the words of Asita Devala,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'the truest of sages, who stands always at the gates of heaven. "This deceitful gaming with cheats is evil; honest victory in war is the finest game! Noble men do not utter barbarism or perform deceits; clean, honourable warfare is the rule for men of virtue." We strive to serve venerable Brahmins to the best of our ability; do not deprive us of that wealth, Śakuni, by defeating us utterly at gambling! I have no desire for pleasures or wealth gained through deceit, for the gambler's way of life wins no honour even if he is honest.'

'When a Vedic scholar competes against one without such scholarship,' answered Śakuni, 'or a learned man against men without learning, that is deception, Yudhiṣṭhīra, though people do not call it so. If you think it deception to compete with me here, or if you are afraid, then refuse the wager!'

'If I am challenged, I shall not refuse,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'for such is the vow that I have sworn. Fate is mighty, O king, and I am under the control of its ordinance. Tell me with whom in this assembly I am to gamble, and also what will be the stake against me; then let the match proceed!'

Duryodhana now spoke: 'I shall stake my wealth and jewels, lord

of the peoples, and Śakuni here, my mother's brother, will play for me.'

'For one person to gamble by means of another seems to me unfair,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'and with all your learning, you too must know that this is so. But let play proceed nevertheless!'

Now, as the match drew near, all the kings entered the hall, headed by Dhṛitarāṣṭra. Bhīṣma, Drona, Kṛpa and sagacious Vidura followed, heir of Bharata; they were not well pleased. In pairs and separately the lion-necked princes of mighty power sat on their many gorgeous lion-thrones, till the hall shone with all the assembled kings as Indra's 20 heaven shines with the blessed gods who gather there. All of those heroes were experts in the Veda, all were radiant as the sun in human form. Now, great king, that friendly gambling match began.

'Here, O king, I have a glorious jewel,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'a lovely pearl necklace set in finest gold. It is of great worth, for it arose from the churning of the ocean.¹ This is my stake, king; now, what is your stake against me? Let things be done in due order, brother, and I shall win this game!'

Duryodhana answered, 'I have both jewels and wealth of every kind, but I do not glory in my riches. I shall win this game!'

25 Then Śakuni, expert dicer, took up the dice; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

[54] 'It is by cheating me that you won this game from me,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra; 'but still let us play, Śakuni, wagering thousands upon thousands! Here I have a hundred jars, each filled with a thousand coins; I have treasure, inexhaustible gold, riches in plenty. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Thus Yudhiṣṭhīra spoke; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to the king.

'Here is the glorious kingly chariot that carried us here,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra; 'it is worth a thousand, decked in tiger-skins, fast-moving with its fine wheels and other gear, adorned with clusters of tinkling bells, 5 roaring like thunderclouds or the ocean, a wonderful, victory-granting chariot drawn by eight fine horses the colour of ospreys that are esteemed throughout the land: all know that neither the chariot nor the

¹ See 1.15-17.

horses' hooves so much as touch the ground. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'I have a thousand rutting elephants, son of Subala,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'with golden girths and auspicious markings, garlanded with gold; they are mounts fit for kings, well broken-in and capable of withstanding all the din of battle, with tusks like plough-shafts and mighty bodies; each one has eight she-elephants for its mates; fortress-destroyers all, these elephants are as huge as mountains or clouds. This is my stake, king; I 10 wager it against you!'

As he spoke these words, Subala's son burst out laughing; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'I have a hundred thousand slave-girls,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'young and lovely, with shell bracelets, medallions and other fair adornments; they are decked with costly garlands and ornaments, well dressed, and sprinkled with sandal-scented water; they bear gold and jewels, and all of them are clad in fine garments. Skilled at singing and dancing, they wait upon householders, ministers and kings at my command. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have 15 won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'I have as many thousands of male slaves,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'respectful, obedient, and always dressed in fine clothes; wise, intelligent and skilful, these young men with their gleaming earrings carry dishes to serve my guests food day and night. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'I have as many chariots,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'with banners and golden trappings, provided with well-trained horses and chariot-fighters who are expert at many forms of war, each one of whom receives at least a thousand as his stipend, for this is their monthly pay, whether fighting or not. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Kuntī's son finished speaking; and 'I have won!' said the hateful, wicked Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'I have Gandharva horses,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'dappled like partridges,

garlanded with gold, which Citraratha was pleased to bestow upon Arjuna the bearer of the bow Gāñḍīva.¹ This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'I have tens of thousands of other chariots, carts and horses,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra; 'they stand ready yoked, together with draft animals of every kind. And in the same way I have standing ready a full sixty thousand broad-chested men, drinkers of milk and eaters of rice-grain, selected in their thousands from every class. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'I have four hundred treasure-chests, clad in copper and iron,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'each one of which contains five hundredweight of purest gold. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

[55] Now Vidura spoke to Dhṛtarāṣṭra: 'Great king, listen to what I have to say to you, and take it to heart, even though what you hear may be no more palatable to you than medicine to a man bent on death. When, long ago, this wicked-minded Duryodhana was only just born, he howled horribly, like a jackal; and now, employed as fate's instrument, he will be the destroyer of the line of Bharata! In your mind you do not realize that a jackal is living in your house in the shape of Duryodhana; but listen to the words of Śukra.² "The honey-gatherer gathers his honey, and does not notice the precipice; he climbs to the top, and then either falls or throws himself to his death."³ And so Duryodhana, crazed with wagering at dice as if with honey, does not look about him; he ignores a precipice as he antagonizes these mighty chariot-fighters. Great king, you know that even amongst the world's kings the Andhakas, Yādavas and Bhojas jointly abandoned Kamsa, regarding him as unfit;

¹ See 2.216.

² The household priest of the demons (see 1.71).

³ This is a reference to the well-known parable of the honey-gatherers: see 5.62.

and when he was killed at their behest by foe-slaying Kṛṣṇa, they, his own kin, rejoiced for a hundred years. Let the ambidextrous warrior Arjuna curb Duryodhana at your behest, and when he is curbed, let the Kurus rejoice at their ease!

'Trade this crow for peacocks, this jackal for tigers! Trade Duryodhana for the Pāṇḍavas, king; do not drown in an ocean of grief! "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!" — so spoke Śukra, the knower of all, the knower of every man's heart, the terror of every enemy, to the mighty demons when they abandoned Jambha.

'It is said, O king, that a certain man took into his house birds from the forest, whose saliva yielded gold; but then he pressed them too hard instead of enjoying them forever, and so, O afflicter of your enemies, destroyed at once both his present and his future in a blind lust for gold. Do not harm the Pāṇḍavas in your own desires for the present, bull-like heir of Bharata, or like that man who killed the birds you will later rue your foolishness! Like a garland-maker in a garden, lovingly take from the Pāṇḍavas each flower as they produce it, one after another; do not burn the trees complete with their roots like a charcoal-burner! Do not bring humiliation on yourself, your sons, your ministers and your troops; for is there anyone, even Indra himself with the Maruts, that could fight against the assembled sons of Kuntī, heir of Bharata?

[56] 'Gambling is the root of dissension; it has for its consequence discord and mighty war. In embarking on it, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son Duryodhana is starting a fierce feud. Through Duryodhana's fault, the descendants of Pratīpa, Saṃtanu and Bhīma, and the Bāhlikas, will all come to grief, for in his utter madness Duryodhana is banishing security from the land, like a mad bull that breaks its own horn by force.

'Whether warrior or seer, the man who violates his own judgement to follow another's inclination is like someone who puts to sea in a boat steered by a child: he plunges into terrible disaster, O king. Duryodhana is gambling with Yudhiṣṭhīra, and this pleases you, for you believe that he is winning. But from this contest for excessive stakes there will arise a war bringing destruction to all men. This ill-advised fascination of yours

will bear heavy fruit; a spell has been spoken, and in your heart it has grown into an obsession. Enjoy the fruit of friendship with Yudhiṣṭhīra; placate the mighty Bowman Arjuna, so that he gives up his enmity!

'You descendants of Pratīpa and Śāntanu, and you too, O king, hear Śukra's word, let it not pass you by! A dreadful, blazing fire is leaping up; extinguish it – do not make war! If Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhīra Ajātaśatru, overcome through his lack of skill, gives free rein to his fury, and so too do wolf-belly Bhīma, and the ambidextrous warrior Arjuna, and the twins, what refuge will there be for you then in the tumult that will follow? Before this match, great king, you were a mine of as much wealth as your heart could wish. If you now win great riches from the Pāṇḍavas, what do you gain? To win true wealth, win over Kuntī's sons! All of us know Śakuni's skill in gambling: the king of the mountain lands knows how to cheat at dice. Let him return whence he came, for the mountain king fights through trickery!'

[57] Duryodhana said, 'Always it is our enemies whose glory forms your boast, while you sneer covertly at us sons of Dhṛitarāṣṭra, and despise us like children. We know you, Vidura, and we know whose friend you are. It is easy to recognize the man whose affections lie elsewhere, for he directs his praise and blame accordingly: your tongue betrays your heart and your mind, and proclaims the depth of your hostility. We took you in like a wild creature and cherished you, but like a cat you harm the man who feeds you. It is said that there is nothing more sinful than hurting one's master; how is it, chamberlain, that you do not fear this sin? We have won great rewards by defeating our enemies, and you should not chastise us for it, chamberlain; but always you delight to find common cause with our foes – again and again you oppose us, fool that you are!'

'The man who speaks enviously has already joined the enemy, and in their friendship for the enemy such men keep their secrets close. How does the shame of that friendship not hold you back? Today you have told us here exactly what you want; you should not despise us, for we know what is in your mind! Go and learn wisdom from the elders! Protect what reputation you have established, Vidura; do not meddle in the affairs of others! You should not despise us on account of your own importance, Vidura; you should not be always chastising us. I do

not ask you what is best for me, so leave well alone, chamberlain, and stop trying our endurance!

'There is but one ruler; there is no other; that ruler rules a man before he is ever born. Ruled by him, like water down a slope, I flow wherever I am directed! If someone breaks a rock with his head, or offers food to a snake, it is the ruler's rule that he carries out. But the man who tries to exert his own rule by force in this world makes enemies for himself. Those who are learned should only tolerate a person who follows the way of friendship; but the man who starts a blazing fire and fails to run in haste from it is left with nothing, heir of Bharata, not even ash.'

'One should not shelter a hostile enemy – especially, O chamberlain, a man who does harm. Therefore, Vidura, go where you want to go! Despite every conciliation, the unchaste wife still deserts her husband!'

Vidura replied, 'The friendship of those who would reject a man on such a pretext is like death itself, O king; would you not say so? But the hearts of kings are fickle; first they conciliate, then they slay with bludgeons. Dull-witted prince, you consider yourself a mature man, and me a foolish child; but the true fool is he who makes a man his friend and then turns against him. This dull-witted man is as much a stranger to improvement as is the whore to the house of the Vedic scholar; and constancy appeals no more to this bull-like heir of Bharata than a sixty-year-old husband to a young girl!'

'If all you want is sycophancy regardless of whether your acts are good or ill, then go and ask the womenfolk, and the dumb and the lame, and other such fools, O king! A sycophant is easy to find here, heir of Pratīpa; but the man who speaks unwelcome truth is as hard to find as the man who will listen to it. None the less, a king's best companion is the one who, trusting in *dharma* and putting aside his master's likes and dislikes, speaks unwelcome truths. The virtuous will drink, but the wicked refuse, a medicine that is bitter, sharp-tasting, fiery, disreputable, harsh and foul-smelling. Quell your anger, great king, and drink it!'

'To Dhṛitarāṣṭra son of Vicitravīrya, and to his sons, I wish eternal wealth and glory; and I wish the same to you, and pay you honour. For myself, let the Brahmins speak a blessing for me. This is what I dutifully tell you, heir of Kuru: a learned man should not stir to anger snakes whose mere gaze is venomous.'

[58] Now Śakuni addressed Yudhiṣṭhīra once more. 'You have already lost much of the Pāṇḍavas' wealth, son of Kuntī; declare what wealth you stake now, if any remains unlost!'

'I know that I have incalculable wealth, Śakuni son of Subala,' answered Yudhiṣṭhīra; 'why do you question me about my wealth? Let the wager be ten thousand, a million, ten billion and one billion more, a hundred million, a thousand billion, a thousand million, a hundred thousand billion! This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'I have horses and cows, including many milkers,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra; 'I have numberless sheep and goats; and I have all the livestock of every kind to the east of the Sindhu,¹ son of Subala. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'My remaining wealth is my city, my country, my land,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'together with all the wealth belonging to non-Brahmins, and the non-Brahmin populace itself. This is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'The earrings and neck-chains,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'and all the bodily adornments that lend lustre to these princes – this is my stake, king; I wager it against you!'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'My wager is this dark young man Nakula,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'with red eyes, lion-like shoulders and strong arms, together with whatever wealth he owns.'

'King Yudhiṣṭhīra,' said Śakuni, 'Prince Nakula, so dear to you, has been added to our treasure! What will you wager next?' With these words he took up the dice; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

'Sahadeva here expounds the different *dharmas*,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'and

¹ The Indus river.

has acquired a worldwide reputation as a scholar. I love the prince, and he does not deserve this, but I wager him against you as though I loved him not.'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra. 'Mādrī's twin sons are dear to you, O king; now you have lost them to me. But I think that Bhīma and wealth-winner Arjuna mean even more to you!'

'Be sure that you are breaching *dharma*, fool,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'in disregarding propriety and seeking to sow dissension among those who wish each other well!'

'The drunk man may fall in a ditch,' replied Śakuni, 'and the absent-minded man may bump into a post; but you are the eldest and best, O king! I pay honour to you, bull-like heir of Bharata! When these cheating gamesters gamble like crazy men, they rave about things never seen, asleep or awake!'

'Prince Arjuna is the world's most spirited hero,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra; 'like a boat he rescues us in battle and defeats our enemies. He does not deserve this, but I wager him against you, Śakuni.'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra. 'I have won from you the bowman of the Pāṇḍavas, the ambidextrous warrior, the son of Pāṇḍu! Now, king, wager your beloved Bhīma, for he is all the stake that you have left!'

'Prince Bhīma is our leader and the leader of our warriors,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'like Indra himself, the god of the thunderbolt and enemy of the demons; noble Bhīma with his lion-like shoulders, glaring with knitted brows, ever unforbearing, foe-crusher and foremost of club-wielders, is unmatched in strength by any other man. He does not deserve this, but I wager him against you, O king.'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra. 'You have lost much wealth; you have lost your brothers, your horses and elephants, son of Kuntī; declare what wealth you stake now, if any remains unlost!'

'I myself remain,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'seniormost of all the brothers, and loved by them. If you win me I shall work for you, for I shall be my own downfall.'

Hearing this, Śakuni resolved and performed his deceit; and 'I have

won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra. 'This is a most sinful thing that you have done, to lose your own self; if other wealth remains, O king, loss of oneself is a sin!'

30 Thus Śakuni, who knew the ways of the dice, won every one of those world-heroes by wagering, throw after throw. Now he spoke again: 'One stake is left to you unlost, your own beloved queen. Wager again: Draupadī, the Pāñcāla princess; win yourself back with her!'

'I wager her against you,' said Yudhiṣṭhīra. 'She is neither short nor tall, neither swarthy nor florid, and her silken garments are dyed red; her eyes are like petals of autumn lotuses, her scent is the scent of autumn lotuses, she decks herself with autumn lotuses, and she is equal in beauty to Śrī. She is a woman such as any man might want who wished for gentleness, who wished for perfect beauty, who wished for perfect disposition. Last to retire to bed and first to rise, she knows everything that has been done or left undone by everybody, even the cowherds and shepherds. Her sweat-flecked face is lovely as a lotus or jasmine flower, her waist slender as a sacrificial altar; her hair is long, her eyes the colour of copper, her body not marred by too much hair. Such is the Pāñcāla princess Draupadī, O king, with her slender waist and her lovely limbs; alas, I wager her against you, son of Subala.'

When Yudhiṣṭhīra lord of *dharma* spoke these words, O heir of Bharata, all the elder courtiers were heard to cry, 'Woe! Woe!' The hall was in turmoil; all the kings fell to talking, while Bhīṣma, Drona, 40 Krpa and the other senior Kurus broke into a sweat. Vidura sat plunged in thought, head in hands, looking like a dead man; staring at the ground, he hissed like a snake. But Dhṛtarāṣṭra was elated, and asked over and over again, 'Has he won? Has he won?', making no attempt to maintain his dignity. Karṇa was overwhelmed with joy, and so were Duhśāsana and the other Kauravas, while others in the hall wept. As for Subala's crazed son Śakuni, he did not hesitate; and 'I have won!' he said triumphantly as he took up the dice yet again.

[59] Now Duryodhana spoke. 'Come, chamberlain,' he said, 'and fetch here Draupadī of great renown, the Pāñdavas' beloved wife! She shall sweep the house, and then hurry away to enjoy her life with our other slave-girls!'

'The unthinkable is happening, thanks to you and your kind,' answered

Vidura. 'Fool! You do not see that you are caught in a trap; you do not realize that you are hanging over a precipice; you are like a deer that stupidly provokes tigers to fury! You are carrying on your head snakes of deadly venom, their poison-sacs full; do not enrage them, fool! Do not set out for Yama's realm! In my judgement Draupadī Kṛṣṇa has not fallen into servitude, heir of Bharata, for King Yudhiṣṭhīra was not his own master when he wagered her.'

'This prince, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son, is like the bamboo that dies in putting forth fruit: he is ripe, and this is the time for his death, yet he does not understand that gambling leads to the most dangerous of feuds. A man should not act to wound; he should not speak cruelly; he should not snatch the final possession from one who has lost all; he should not utter that hurtful, infernal word which causes another man distress. When bad words leave a person's mouth to bring grief night and day to those they hurt, they never fail to strike the weakest spots; therefore no learned man will direct them at others.'

'It is said that once, when men had lost a knife, their goat tore at the ground with its hooves till it dug up another: its throat was cut most horribly. Do not do likewise! Do not dig up a feud with the Pāñdavas! Men do not speak ill of a praiseworthy man, whether pious householder, forest-dwelling sage, or learned ascetic; but curs forever bay like you. Son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you do not realize that this is the dreadful, crooked gate to hell: many of the Kurus will follow you and Duhśāsana through it, thanks to your success at gambling! Bottle-gourds may sink and stones may float, boats may forever sail the wrong way on the water, but this foolish prince, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son, will never listen to my beneficial words. Without doubt he will be the end of the Kurus, a terrible destruction sweeping all away, for the prophetic, beneficial words of his friends are ignored, and only greed flourishes!'

[60] 'Curse you, chamberlain!' said the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and in his mad pride he caught the eye of his page and addressed him in the midst of all the nobles in the hall. 'Fetch Draupadī, my page! You have no fear of the Pāñdavas, even if the chamberlain here is scared and disputes my order! But, after all, he has never wanted us to prosper!'

The page, a Sūta, received his orders. He set off as soon as he learnt King Duryodhana's command, entered the dwelling as a dog might enter

the den of a lion, and approached the Pāṇḍavas' queen. 'Yudhiṣṭhira is overcome by the intoxication of gambling,' he said, 'and so, Draupadī, you have been won by Duryodhana. You must therefore now enter Dhṛtarāṣṭra's household: I shall conduct you to your duties, daughter of Drupada!'

5 'How can you speak so, page?' replied Draupadī. 'What prince would ever wager his own wife? The foolish king may be overcome by the intoxication of gambling, but had he nothing else to stake?'

'It was when he had nothing else to stake that Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhira Ajātaśatru wagered you,' answered the page. 'First the king staked his brothers and, indeed, himself; then, princess, he staked you.'

'Go, son of a Sūta,' said Draupadī; 'go and ask that gambler in the hall: "Heir of Bharata, did you first lose yourself, or me?" Return when you have learnt this, son of a Sūta; then you may conduct me there.'

So he went back to the hall and announced what Draupadī had said. 'These were Draupadi's words to you: "When you lost me, of whom were you master? Did you first lose yourself, or me?"' But Yudhiṣṭhira remained motionless, like a dead man, and made no answer to the Sūta, whether for good or ill.

10 Now Duryodhana spoke. 'Let the Pāñcāla princess, Draupadī Kṛṣṇā, come here in person to pose this question! Here in this hall let everyone hear what she and this man have to say!'

The Sūta page, obedient to Duryodhana's will, returned to the royal quarters and spoke to Draupadī in evident distress. 'Princess, the courtiers there summon you! I think that the destruction of the Kauravas must be at hand, for if you are to come to the hall, princess, it is clear that Duryodhana, basest of men, cares nothing for our welfare.'

Draupadī answered, 'This, for sure, is what the ordainer ordained. The wise and the foolish are touched alike by both good and ill, but a single *dharma* has been declared paramount in this world which will, if protected, maintain us in peace.'

15 Now when Yudhiṣṭhira realized what Duryodhana intended to do, he sent to Draupadī a messenger whom she trusted, O bull-like heir of Bharata; and the Pāñcāla princess came to the hall and stood before her father-in-law Dhṛtarāṣṭra, weeping and wearing a single unbelted garment, for she was in the midst of her period. King Duryodhana

looked at the faces before him and exultantly addressed the Sūta: 'Bring her right here, page! Let the Kurus speak to her face to face!'

Then the Sūta, who was obedient to his will but fearful of the anger of Drupada's daughter, put aside pride, and appealed once more to the courtiers: 'What should I say to Draupadī Kṛṣṇā?'

'Look, Duḥśāsana,' said Duryodhana, 'this idiot son of a Sūta of mine is frightened of wolf-belly Bhīma! Lay hold of Drupada's daughter yourself, and bring her here. Our rivals are powerless: what can they do?'

20 Prince Duḥśāsana listened to his brother, then arose, his eyes red with anger. He entered the quarters of the mighty chariot-fighters, and spoke to Princess Draupadī. 'Come, Pāñcāla girl, come! You have been won. Put aside modesty, Draupadī, and look upon Duryodhana with your long lotus-eyes! Now you must transfer your affections to the Kurus, for they have won you fairly. Come to the hall!'

Then she arose, her heart full of grief, and she wiped her pale face with her hand. In her distress she ran to the womenfolk of old King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the bull-like Kuru; but Duḥśāsana rushed at her, roaring in fury, and grabbed the wife of the lord of men by her long, dark, flowing hair. Her hair, which had been sprinkled with water purified by *mantras* during the ritual bath concluding the great rite of the royal consecration, was now handled roughly by Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son to slight the Pāṇḍavas' manhood. Duḥśāsana laid hold of Draupadī Kṛṣṇā with her deep black hair and led her towards the hall, unprotected in the midst of her protectors, dragging her as the wind drags at a battered plantain tree. As she was dragged along, she bowed her slender body low and spoke softly: 'Today I am in the midst of my period, dull-witted prince, and I am wearing a single garment! You ignoble man, you should not take me to the hall!'

25 But he held Draupadī Kṛṣṇā firm by her black hair, and he said to her, 'Call for aid to Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, to Nara and Nārāyaṇa; I am taking you! You may be in the midst of your period, daughter of Drupada, and you may be wearing a single garment or, indeed, none at all; you have been won at gambling and you have been made our slave! Enjoy your pleasures now amongst our other slave-girls!'

Her hair was dishevelled and her garment fallen half off through

Duhśāsana's manhandling. But, modest and burning with anger, Draupadi Kṛṣṇā softly spoke these words: 'The men here in this hall expound learned texts and perform the rituals; all of them are warriors like Indra; all of them are my elders or as good as my elders. I cannot stand before them like this! You are acting cruelly and ignobly. Do not strip my clothes from me! Do not drag me! The princes could never forgive what you are doing, even if the very gods with Indra were to take your side!'

King Yudhiṣṭhīra is the son of Dharma and abides by *dharma*, and *dharma* is subtle, requiring skill to understand it. I would not wish even a word of mine to deviate from virtue and bring my lord the least atom of blame. But for you to drag me into the midst of the Kuru heroes in the midst of my period is ignoble; and nobody here shows me any respect! Clearly they all approve your way of thinking. A curse upon you! The *dharma* of the Bhāratas is destroyed, and so is adherence to the Kṣatriya way, for every one of the Kurus in this hall is watching whilst the limits of Kuru *dharma* are breached. Drona has no mettle, nor Bhīṣma, nor, for sure, noble King Dhṛitarāṣṭra here, for they, the seniormost of the Kurus, take no notice of this savage violation of *dharma*!'

Thus the slender-waisted lady lamented, and she gazed at her furious husbands, inflaming the Pāṇḍavas with her glances till they were ready to burst with anger. Neither the loss of their kingship, nor that of their wealth or their finest jewels, caused them to grieve as did the angry gaze that Draupadi Kṛṣṇā directed at them in her distress.

As for Duhśāsana, when he saw her looking at her wretched husbands, he shook her roughly till she nearly fainted, and 'Slave!' he said with a savage laugh. And Karna praised his words, laughing aloud in great glee; and Subala's son, Śakuni king of Gāndhāra, likewise applauded Duhśāsana. But apart from these two, and from Duryodhana son of Dhṛitarāṣṭra, the other courtiers who were present were greatly grieved to see Draupadi Kṛṣṇā dragged into the hall.

'Good lady,' said Bhīṣma, 'it is true that *dharma* is subtle, so that I cannot properly decide this question of yours; for I recognize that whilst a man without property cannot wager the property of another, a woman is always subservient to her husband. Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhīra would give up the world and all its wealth, but he would never abandon

truth, and he stated that he had been won; this is why I cannot judge this question of yours. Śakuni is unequalled among men at gambling, but he allowed Yudhiṣṭhīra son of Kuntī free choice, and that noble man did not consider that what took place was deceit; this is why I cannot address this question of yours.'

'The king was challenged in this hall by skilled gamblers,' replied Draupadī, 'by wicked, ignoble deceivers, men who love gambling, while he had had little practice. How can you say that he was allowed free choice? Foremost among the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas, he is pure by nature and does not understand the ways of deceit; that is why, even though he had been won by all of them conspiring together, he agreed to wager me afterwards. Let all the Kurus present in this hall, men with sons and daughters-in-law under their authority, consider what I have said, and properly decide this question of mine!'

Thus she lamented and wept, gazing over and over again at her husbands, while Duhśāsana spoke to her words that were harsh and hateful and bitter. Dragged along in the midst of her period, with her garment slipping from her, though she least deserved such treatment – wolf-belly Bhīma looked at her, and then at Yudhiṣṭhīra, and in his unbearable distress he gave vent to his fury.

[61] 'The gamblers in this land have their whores, Yudhiṣṭhīra,' he said, 'but they do not wager them; indeed, they show them kindness! The offerings of wealth and other fine goods that the king of Kāśī brought, the jewels that other kings presented to us, our steeds, our riches, our armour, our weapons, our kingdom, we ourselves and you yourself, have all been wagered and won by others, and this has not angered me, for you are master of all we own. But it seems to me that in staking Draupadī you went too far. The girl does not deserve this; she has joined herself to the Pāṇḍavas, yet, thanks to you, she is tormented by base, cruel, deceitful Kauravas! It is for her sake that I turn my fury on you, king. I shall burn these arms of yours! Fetch fire, Sahadeva!'

'Bhīma!' said Arjuna. 'Never before have you spoken such words! Our cruel enemies must have destroyed your respect for *dharma*. You should not give those enemies what they desire. Practise highest *dharma*, and do not rebel against your righteous elder brother; for if a king is

challenged by others, he should recall his Kṣatriya *dharma* and gamble at their wish: this brings us great glory!'

10 'Wealth-winner Arjuna,' answered Bhīma, 'if I believed that he had acted out of self-indulgence, I would overpower him and burn his two arms in a blazing fire!'

Now when Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son Vikarna saw the Pāṇḍavas so distressed, and Draupadī in such torment, he spoke these words: 'Princes, you must decide the matter put to you by Drupada's daughter; if we fail to judge this matter we shall go straight to hell! Bhīṣma and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the two seniormost of the Kurus, both say nothing, and so does sagacious Vidura; Bharadvāja's son Droṇa, the Teacher of us all, and Kṛpa too, the two truest of Brahmins, do not address this question. But the other lords 15 of the earth who are assembled here from every quarter should put aside personal anger and desire, and speak as they judge. Fair Draupadī has raised this matter repeatedly; consider it, princes, and give your answer: which of you takes which side?'

Many times Vikarna addressed all those courtiers thus, but the lords of the earth did not reply to him, whether for good or ill. Then, after speaking so several times to them all, he wrung his hands, exhaled deeply, and said, 'Decide the matter, or decide it not, lords of the earth! Either way, O Kauravas, I shall tell you what I think proper in this case. It is said, O best of men, that kings are subject 20 to four vices: hunting, drinking, dicing and excessive sexual indulgence. The man who is addicted to these lives his life shunning *dharma*, and the world holds the deeds of such an unfit person to be of no account.'

'Pāṇḍu's son entered upon the wager of Draupadī when he was utterly given over to one such vice, having been challenged by cheating gamesters; further, this blameless girl is the common wife of all of the Pāṇḍavas, and the wager was made by Yudhiṣṭhīra after he himself had been lost; what is more, it was Subala's son Śakuni himself who first named Draupadi Kṛṣṇā when he was seeking a stake. Bearing all this in mind, I consider that she has not been won.'

25 At these words, there arose in the hall a great uproar of voices praising Vikarna and condemning Śakuni. When the noise was stilled, Rādhā's son Karṇa, nearly swooning with rage, brandished a handsome arm and

spoke: 'Many perversities are to be seen in Vikarna, which, though they spring from him, will destroy him as fire burns the firestick that kindles it. These princes have said not a word, for all the pleading of Draupadī Kṛṣṇā: I think they think Drupada's daughter fairly won! Son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, it is your own childish folly that tears you apart, so that you, a boy, speak an old man's words in the midst of the assembly. Nor do you truly understand *dharma*, dull-witted younger brother of Duryodhana, if you claim that Draupadī has not been won, when won she was! How can you think Kṛṣṇā not won, son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, when Pāṇḍu's eldest son staked all his possessions in this hall, and Draupadī was one of those possessions? How can you think Kṛṣṇā not won, bull-like heir of Bharata, when she was fairly won? Draupadī was named aloud, and the Pāṇḍavas assented; so for what reason do you think her not won?'

30 'Or perhaps you think it was not right that she was brought to this hall wearing a single garment; well, hear my superior view of this issue too. The gods ordain one husband for a woman, heir of Kuru, yet she submits to several: thus she is clearly a whore, and in my judgement it is not remarkable that she should be brought to the hall, or that she should be wearing a single garment, or, indeed, none at all! Subala's son Śakuni fairly won all the Pāṇḍavas' wealth: whatever riches they possessed, and this woman, and themselves.'

35 'Duhśāsana, this Vikarna with his wise talk is just a foolish boy. Strip off the Pāṇḍavas' garments, and those of Draupadī too!'

When the Pāṇḍavas heard this, heir of Bharata, they all removed their upper garments and sat down in the hall. Then Duhśāsana forcibly grabbed Draupadī's garment in the middle of the hall, O king, and began 40 to pull it from her. But, lord of the peoples, as he pulled at Draupadī's garment, another garment just like it appeared, and this happened over and over again. At this, all the lords of the earth gave a dreadful cry as they saw this most wonderful sight in the world.

45 But Bhīma, wringing his hands, his lower lip throbbing in anger, loudly pronounced a curse in the midst of the kings: 'Kṣatriyas of the world, hear these words of mine that no other man ever spoke before, nor will ever speak again! Lords of the earth, may I not attain the realm of all my ancestors if, having said this, I do not carry it out; if in battle

I do not rip open the breast of this wicked sinner, this bastard Bhārata, and drink his blood!

His words made the hair rise on everyone's body. Those who heard them did him great honour, and reviled Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son. As for Duḥśāsana, having amassed a pile of garments in the middle of the hall, he sat down, wearied and ashamed. The princes of men present in the hall uttered many a hair-raising cry of 'Alas! Alas!' when they saw the sons of Kuntī; people called out, 'The Kauravas will not decide Draupadi's question!' and they censured Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

Now Vidura, expert in *dharma*, raised his arms to silence the courtiers, and spoke these words: 'Draupadi has posed this question; now she weeps pitifully as though she had no one to protect her, while you will not decide the matter! This is an affront to *dharma*, courtiers! The person who comes before the assembly in distress is like a blazing fire; the courtiers in that assembly extinguish the flames with truth and *dharma*. When such a distressed person poses a question on *dharma* to the courtiers, they should decide that question, putting aside personal anger and desire. Vikarṇa has addressed the question according to his own wisdom, lords of men, and now you too should decide it, and speak as you judge. For if a member of an assembly who understands *dharma* will not decide such a question, half of the guilt of lying is his; and if a member of an assembly who stands *dharma* gives a false answer, the full guilt of lying is his, for sure!'

To reinforce his point, Vidura now cites the story of Prahlāda, who gave true judgement against his own son;¹ but it is to no avail.

The princes heard what Vidura had to say, but they spoke not a word. Then Karṇa said to Duḥśāsana, 'Take this slave-girl, Draupadi Kṛṣṇā, into the house!' And in the middle of the hall, Duḥśāsana dragged her away, wretched and ashamed, trembling and crying out pitifully to the Pāṇḍavas.

[62] 'I have a great duty that I should have performed before, but

¹ For this story see 5.35, where the alternative form of name Prahrāda is used.

could not,' said Draupadī, 'because of my distress at being dragged here by force by this mighty man. I greet the elders in this assembly of Kurus! Let me not be blamed for not doing so sooner! Then the wretched girl fell, partly from his manhandling and partly from grief, and there in the hall she lamented, for she was unused to such treatment.

'Kings once assembled in the arena to see me at my *svayamvara*, but otherwise I have never before been seen in public; and today I am brought into this hall! Till now in my own house neither wind nor sun has ever seen me; and today in the middle of this hall, this assembly of Kurus, I am exposed to the view of all! Till now in my own house the Pāṇḍavas would not permit the wind to touch me; and today they allow me to be touched by this wicked man! I think that fate has turned against me, for now these Kurus permit their daughter-in-law, their daughter, to be tormented when she does not deserve it! But worse than this is that I, a virtuous and upright woman, should today have to enter right into the middle of the hall! Where is the *dharma* of the lords of the earth? Formerly righteous women were not brought into the hall, or so we have been told; but this ancient eternal law has lapsed among the Kauravas! How could I – wife of the Pāṇḍavas, sister of Pṛṣṭa's heir Dhṛṣṭadyumna, friend of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva – enter this hall of kings?

'I am the wife of Yudhiṣṭhira lord of *dharma*, and equal to him by birth; tell me, am I slave or free? I shall abide by what you say, O Kauravas! But for this base man, defiler of the Kauravas' good name, to torment me so badly: that I shall not tolerate long! Whether you consider me won or unwon, kings, I want your answer; I shall abide by what you say, O Kauravas!'

Bhīṣma answered her: 'O fair one, I have already said that the way of *dharma* is the highest; not even noble priests can follow it in this world. And in this world whatever a powerful man regards as *dharma* is said by others to be *dharma*, even if it falls within the limits of *adharma*. I cannot judge this question of yours with certainty, because of the subtlety, profundity and seriousness of the issue.

'The end of this Kuru line must be at hand, since the Kurus are all

devoted to greed and folly! Those born into such lines, O fair one, do not fall from the path of *dharma*, even when calamity overwhelms them; and you stand here as our daughter-in-law. Your conduct, Pāñcāla princess, is proper and befitting, for though you have met with misfortune, you still maintain your regard for *dharma*. These elders, Drona and the others, are experts in *dharma*, but they sit with heads down, as if they were dead men with empty bodies. However, in my judgement it is Yudhiṣṭhira 20 himself who is the authority on this question of yours. He should tell you whether you are won or unwon.'

The lords of the earth saw everything that had happened, and Draupadī shrieking like a stricken osprey, but they spoke not a word, whether for good or ill, for they were frightened of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son. And Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son saw that those sons and grandsons of princes were silenced, and then with a smile he spoke to the daughter of the king of Pāñcāla. 'Let this question of yours pass to Bhīma of noble mettle, to Arjuna, to Sahadeva, to your husband, to Nakula, O daughter of Drupada; let them address the matter you have raised. Let them decide for your sake, in the midst of these nobles, that Yudhiṣṭhira is not your master, Pāñcāla girl! Let them all make the lord of *dharma* a liar, and you will escape slavery! The noble lord of *dharma*, Indra-like Yudhiṣṭhira, abides by *dharma*: let him tell you this himself – is he your master, or is he not? Then when he has spoken, you must at once declare yourself his or ours. All these Kauravas here in the hall share in your own misery; that is why, when they see your bands so unfortunate, these heroes of noble mettle cannot decide your case.'

Now all the courtiers present there gave loud applause to the words of the Kuru king: they waved their garments and roared, though cries of woe were also heard. All the princes were delighted, and they did honour to righteous Duryodhana, best of Kurus. All of them regarded Yudhiṣṭhira out of the corners of their eyes, wondering what the expert in *dharma* would say, filled with the greatest curiosity too to know what Arjuna Bībhatsu, the Pāñḍava undefeated in battle, would say, and Bhīma, and the twins.

When the noise was stilled, Bhīma spoke, brandishing a mighty, well-formed, sandal-scented arm: 'If Yudhiṣṭhira lord of *dharma* were

not our elder and lord of our line, we should not forgive this! If the master of our merits and our austerities, the lord of our lives, considers himself won, we too are won. No mortal who walks the earth would have escaped me alive for laying hands on the hair of the Pāñcāla princess here! Look at these two long, well-formed arms of mine, like two iron bars! Not even Indra of a hundred sacrifices could escape once he had come between them! Bound as I am by the snares of *dharma*, I start no trouble: respect prevents me, and Arjuna is restraining me. But if the lord of *dharma* lets me loose, with my bare hands for weapons I shall ravage these wicked Dhārtarāṣṭras as a lion ravages lesser creatures!'

But now Bhīṣma, Drona and Vidura spoke to him: 'You must show forbearance! With you, anything may happen!'

[63] Karna said, 'They say that these three may hold no property: the slave, the student and the dependent woman. As the wife of a slave, lady, you are now the property of Duryodhana here, a slave-girl without husband, one of the slaves he owns. So enter our house, and favour us with your attentions: we bid you enter, and we assign you this duty! We Dhārtarāṣṭras are now all your lords, princess, not the sons of Pāṇḍu! Lovely one, quickly choose another husband, one who will not wager you into slavery! Among slaves, as you know, a sensual disposition towards one's masters is never taken amiss: let yours be so!'

'Nakula is defeated; so is Bhīma; so are Yudhiṣṭhira, Sahadeva and Arjuna. Enter our house as our slave, daughter of Drupada, for those who have been defeated are no longer your husbands. What value to himself can Kuntī's son put upon his valour and his manliness, to gamble away in the midst of the assembly this daughter of Drupada, king of Pāñcāla?'

When unforbearing Bhīma heard this, he snorted furiously in his distress; but, loyal to King Yudhiṣṭhira and bound by the snares of *dharma*, he merely turned his angry red eyes upon Karna as if to burn him up. 'O king,' he said, 'I am not angry with this son of a Sūta, for in truth this is the *dharma* of slaves, which is now ours. But how would our enemies have resisted me today if you had not wagered this lady, lord of men?'

As for King Duryodhana, when he heard the words of Rādhā's son Karna, he addressed Yudhiṣṭhira who sat silent before him, nearly out of his mind: 'O king, Bhīma, Arjuna and the twins accept your authority. Decide the question of whether you consider Draupadī Kṛṣṇā unwon!' 10 Then, after speaking thus to Kuntī's son, he drew apart his garment, and, looking at the Pāñcāla princess with the smile of a man intoxicated by absolute power, to amuse Rādhā's son and outrage Bhīma, he exposed to the gaze of Draupadī – long like a plantain-stem, graced with every auspicious mark, firm as an elephant's trunk, strong as adamant – his own left thigh.

Wolf-belly Bhīma saw this. Opening wide his red eyes, he announced to him in the midst of the kings, as if declaiming it to the entire assembly, 'May the wolf-belly not share his ancestors' realm if in a mighty battle 15 I do not smash that thigh with my club!' So great was his rage that fiery flames issued forth from his every orifice, as from the hollows of a burning tree.

'Behold the great danger that you face from Bhīma!' said Vidura. 'Take note of it: it is like the noose of King Varuṇa!¹ Be sure that this terrible disaster that has arisen amongst the Bhāratas was directed from the first by fate. You sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, you have wagered for excessive stakes, and now you dispute over this woman in the hall. Your security seems in great danger, for the Kurus are engaging in wicked plots. Learn quickly your *dharma*! If it is not well understood, the whole assembly will be befooled!

'If the gambler Yudhiṣṭhira had wagered this woman earlier, before losing himself, he would have been her master. But, as I judge it, property wagered by one not its owner is like property won in a dream! When you hear what Gāndhārī's son Duryodhana has to say, do not deviate from this *dharma*, Kurus!'

20 'I shall abide by the word of Bhīma,' said Duryodhana; 'likewise that of Arjuna and of the twins too. If they will declare that Yudhiṣṭhira was not their master, then Drupada's daughter will escape slavery.'

'When first he staked us,' Arjuna replied, 'King Yudhiṣṭhira, the noble

¹ See note to 2.12.11. One of Varuṇa's functions in the Vedic period was the punishment of sinners, whom he bound in fetters.

lord of *dharma*, Kuntī's son, was our master. But whose master was he after losing himself? That is what all of you Kurus must decide!'

And then in the house of King Dhṛtarāṣṭra a jackal howled loudly in the chamber of the sacred fire. Asses gave answer, king, and so did frightful birds all around. Sagacious Vidura heard this dreadful noise, as did Śākuni son of Subala. Bhīṣma, Drona and learned Kṛpa heir of Gotama loudly called out blessings. Then Gāndhārī and the learned Vidura in great distress informed the king of the terrible portent they had witnessed, at which the king spoke these words: 'Dull-witted prince Duryodhana, you have brought down destruction upon yourself for speaking discourteously in the assembly to a woman belonging to these bull-like Kurus, and especially to Draupadī, their lawful wife!'

Then wise Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who wished his Pāñdava kinsmen well, withdrew; and after wise reflection the sagacious king addressed Drupada's daughter Kṛṣṇā in conciliatory tones: 'Daughter of Drupada, choose from me whatever boon you wish, for among my daughters-in-law you are the most distinguished in your devotion to *dharma*!'

'If you are granting me a boon, bull-like heir of Bharata,' answered Draupadī, 'my choice is that glorious Yudhiṣṭhira, who observes all *dharma*, should be freed from slavery. For I would not have ignorant boys cry out, "Here is the slave's son!" when they see my spirited son Prativindhya coming. Having been once a king's son, and cherished like no other man, he would die, heir of Bharata, if he found he was now the son of a slave.'

'Lady, I give you a second boon,' said Dhṛtarāṣṭra. 'Choose one from me, for my heart grants it. A single boon is not worthy of you!'

'For my second boon,' Draupadī replied, 'I choose Bhīma, wealth-winner Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, with their chariots and their bows.'

'Choose a third from me,' Dhṛtarāṣṭra now said; 'two do not do you sufficient honour, for of all my daughters-in-law you are best in the practice of *dharma*!'

'Blessed sir,' said Draupadī, 'greed destroys *dharma*. I cannot take a third boon from you, for I am not worthy, truest of kings. They say that the Vaiśya receives one boon, the Kṣatriya woman two, while three

boons are for the king, prince of kings, and a hundred boons for the Brahmin. These husbands of mine were in terrible straits, but they have been rescued, and they will live to see good fortunes through acts of virtue, O king!

[64] Karna said, 'Of all the women whose beauty we hear praised in the world, not one has done such a deed, as far as we have heard. When the sons of Kuntī and of Dhrtarāṣṭra were filled with extreme rage, this Draupadī Kṛṣṇā became the Pāñḍavas' deliverance; when they were sinking and drowning in a shifting, shipless ocean, this Pāñcāla princess became the boat that brought the Pāñḍavas to land!'

When, in the midst of the Kurus, the unforbearing Bhīma heard this – that the Pāñḍavas had been rescued by a woman – he said, with angry heart, 'According to Devala there are three lights in a man: offspring, deeds and learning. Through these, creatures attain being, for when the body, impure, lifeless and empty, is cast away by one's kin, it is these three that still exist of a man. But one of our lights has been put out, because our wife has been tainted: how, wealth-winner Arjuna, can offspring be born from a tainted woman?'

'Bhāratas never respond to the insults of the base,' answered Arjuna, 'whether these are spoken or unspoken; they remain always the most superior of men. Virtuous folk remember only the kindnesses they have been shown, not the acts of hostility; they have the self-confidence to distinguish between the two.'

10 'Right here, right now,' said Bhīma to Yudhiṣṭhira, 'I shall slay all these assembled enemies! Step outside, prince of kings, and cut them down, roots and all! Why should we trouble to discuss it? I shall kill them here and now, and you shall rule the earth!' With these words, Bhīma, who was surrounded by his younger brothers like a lion surrounded by deer, began to glance repeatedly towards his club. Kuntī's son Arjuna tirelessly calmed him and cooled him, but the strong-armed hero was sweating with his inner burning. So great was his rage, lord of men, that from his ears and other orifices a fiery flame issued forth, smoking and sparkling; his puckered frown contorted his face till he appeared like Death at the time of doomsday.

Yudhiṣṭhira restrained the strong-armed hero with his own arm: 'Do not do this!' he said to him; 'stand easy, heir of Bharata!' Then,

when he had restrained mighty Bhīma, whose eyes were red with anger, he joined his hands together and approached his father Dhrtarāṣṭra.

[65] 'O king,' said Yudhiṣṭhira, 'what should we do for you? Command us: you are our lord, and our wish is always to remain under your authority, heir of Bharata!'

'Bless you, Yudhiṣṭhira Ajātaśatru!' replied Dhrtarāṣṭra. 'You have my leave to go in peace and welfare, with all your wealth. Rule your own kingdom! But give due thought to this, an old man's command which I utter with all my wisdom: it will confer the greatest benefit upon you.'

'You know, Yudhiṣṭhira my son, that the way of all the *dharma*s is subtle: you are courteous and wise, and you wait upon your elders. Where there is intelligence there is peace. Attain peace, heir of Bharata! An axe makes no impression on a non-wooden object, but on wood it is wielded to effect; the most superior of men take no heed of acts of hostility, for they see virtues, not faults, and they do not indulge in strife. Base men may utter insults in a dispute, Yudhiṣṭhira, and middling men reply with insults of their own; but the wise never respond to hurtful insults, whether these are spoken or unspoken; they remain always the most superior of men. Virtuous folk remember only the kindnesses they have been shown, not the acts of hostility; they have the self-confidence to distinguish between the two. Your own behaviour in this honourable assembly has been noble; therefore, my son, do not take Duryodhana's insulting behaviour to heart.'

10 'Heir of Bharata, look at your mother Gāndhārī; look too at me, your old blind father who stands here praying for your virtues. I connived at this gambling match for the sake of seeing: I wished to see my friends, and also my sons' strengths and weaknesses.'

15 'With you as ruler, O king, and wise Vidura, learned in every lore, as minister, the Kurus are to be envied! In you is *dharma*, in Arjuna heroism, in Bhīma valour, and in the twins, those foremost of men, are faith and obedience to elders. Bless you, Yudhiṣṭhira Ajātaśatru! Return to Khāṇḍavaprastha. May there be brotherhood with your Dhārtarāṣṭra brothers, and may your heart reflect on *dharma*.'

When Yudhiṣṭhira, best heir of Bharata and lord of *dharma*, heard these words, he gave his full assent in due form and departed with his

brothers. They mounted their cloud-like chariots, and together with Draupadi Kṛṣṇā they set forth with hearts full of joy for Indraprastha, best of cities.

THE SECOND GAMBLING MATCH

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[66] O king, when Duḥśāsana learnt that wise Dhṛtarāṣṭra had given the Pāṇḍavas leave to depart, he went at once to his brother. Best heir of Bharata, he found Duryodhana in the company of his ministers, and in his distress, O bull-like heir of Bharata, he spoke these words to him: 'That old man is throwing away everything that we took such trouble to acquire; he has handed our wealth over to our enemy! Understand this, mighty chariot-fighters!'

5 Duryodhana, Karṇa and Śākuni son of Subala now plotted together in their pride against the Pāṇḍavas. They hastily approached wise King Dhṛtarāṣṭra son of Vicitravīrya, and addressed him in bland tones.

'Have you not heard, O king,' said Duryodhana, 'what Bṛhaspati, the learned household priest of the gods, said to Indra when he expounded governance to him? "Tormentor of your enemies, enemies should be slain by every means, before they do you harm through war or through force." Now if we were to use the Pāṇḍavas' wealth to pay honour to all the other princes, and then engage the Pāṇḍavas themselves in battle, how could we fail?

10 'If a man places round his neck and on his back snakes of deadly venom, angry and ready to bite him, how can he cast them off again? The Pāṇḍavas are angry, father; they are armed and mounted in their chariots, and like angry snakes of deadly venom they will destroy us utterly! Arjuna goes about wearing battle-armour, with his two splendid arrow-cases opened; over and over again he takes up his bow Gāndīva and looks about him, hissing. Wolf-belly Bhīma, we have heard, is brandishing his heavy club; he has hastened to yoke his chariot and has set out at speed. Nakula has taken up his sword and his shield decked with eight moons; he and Sahadeva and King Yudhiṣṭhīra are 15 making their attitude clear through their gestures. All of them have

mounted their chariots, which are full of weapons and other gear; they are whipping up the chariot-teams and riding out to muster their army. They will never forgive us, since they suffered such injury at our hands – and which of them could forgive Draupadi's torment?

'Bless you, bull-like heir of Bharata! We should gamble again with the Pāṇḍavas for a stake of exile in the forest: in this way we shall be able to get them into our power! Whoever is defeated in the match, whether they or we ourselves, must enter the mighty forest for twelve years, clad in antelope-skins,¹ then dwell for a thirteenth year unrecognized in a populous place, and, if recognized, for a further twelve years in the forest.

20 'Let this wager proceed! Let the Pāṇḍavas throw the dice and gamble again with us! This, bull-like king, is our most pressing duty, for Śākuni here knows in full how to win at dicing. We shall embrace our allies and establish ourselves firmly in the kingship, while we prepare an invincible army, vast and powerful; and then if, in the thirteenth year, they should succeed in completing their observance, we shall defeat them, O king! Give your approval, afflicter of your enemies!'

'By all means bring them back here,' replied Dhṛtarāṣṭra, 'even if they have travelled halfway! Let the Pāṇḍavas return, and let them gamble again!'

25 Thereupon Drona, Somadatta, the great chariot-fighter Bāhlika, Vidura, Drona's son Aśvathāman, Yuyutsu the heroic son of the Vaiśya woman,² Bhūriśravas, Bhīṣma son of Śāntanu, and the great chariot-fighter Vikarna – all of them said, 'Do not gamble again! Let there be peace!' But though all his friends opposed it, since they understood how matters stood, Dhṛtarāṣṭra had the Pāṇḍavas summoned, for he was fond of his son.

Now Gāndhārī, who had grown thin with grief, great king, spoke words of *dharma* to Dhṛtarāṣṭra lord of men, prompted by her love for

1 As becomes explicit later (2.68.9), the losers are to be made to act out the observances undertaken by those who are about to perform a Vedic sacrifice, which include dressing in antelope-skins – without, of course, receiving the benefit that the ritual itself would bring. (When the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is exiled, he is similarly told to wear the matted hair and bark-cloth garments of an ascetic: *Rāmāyaṇa* 2.16.25.)

2 See 1.107.35–6.

her son: 'At Duryodhana's birth the sagacious chamberlain said, "He should be dispatched to the other world. He will certainly defile his lineage, for no sooner was he born, heir of Bharata, than he howled like a jackal. It is plain that he will bring the line to its end; take note of this, O Kurus." My lord, you should not lend your approval to the opinions of immature boys! You should not become the cause of this terrible destruction of the line!'

'Who would breach a dam once it was built? Who would fan flames that had died down? Kuntī's sons are resolved upon peace; who would stir them to new anger? You remember this, O Kaurava, but let me remind you again: learning teaches nothing to a fool, whether for good or ill! An old man like you, king, should never adopt a boy's opinions; your sons should be guided by you. They should not desert you and go their own ways! Your judgement is founded on peace, *dharma*, and the judgement of another; let it not now turn against you. Wealth that is acquired through cruelty is easily lost, but when it grows gently it passes to sons and grandsons!'

Then the great king answered Gāndhārī, who understood *dharma*: 'By all means let the lineage end! I cannot prevent it. Let it be exactly as they desire; let the Pāṇḍavas return, and let my sons gamble again with the sons of Pāṇḍu!'

[67] Yudhiṣṭhīra son of Kuntī had travelled halfway when a page addressed him at the command of wise King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. 'These are your father's words to you, heir of Bharata: "The hall has been made ready, king. O Yudhiṣṭhīra son of Pāṇḍu, come, throw the dice and gamble!"'

'It is at fate's command that creatures experience good and ill,' replied Yudhiṣṭhīra, 'and neither can be prevented if I must gamble again. I cannot reject a challenge to gamble with dice at the command of an elder, even though I know the destruction it will bring.'

With these words, Pāṇḍu's son turned back with his brothers; though he knew Śakuni's trickery, the son of Kuntī returned to gamble again. Once again the bull-like chariot-fighters entered that hall, bringing dismay to the hearts of their friends. They sat at their ease to resume the gambling, to destroy the whole world, for they were under fate's oppression.

Śakuni said, 'The old man returned your wealth to you, and I applaud that! But now, bull-like heir of Bharata, listen while I tell you of a single wager for a great stake. If we are defeated in the match by you, we must enter the mighty forest for twelve years, clad in the skins of *ruru* deer, then dwell for a thirteenth year unrecognized in a populous place, and, if recognized, for a further twelve years in the forest. If, on the other hand, you are defeated by us, you must dwell for twelve years in the forest together with Draupadī Kṛṣṇā, clad in antelope-skins. And when the thirteenth year is completed, the kingdom is to be returned again, by us or by yourselves, to its rightful owners. With this resolve, Yudhiṣṭhīra heir of Bharata, come, throw the dice, and gamble again with us!'

'Woe and alas!' said the courtiers. 'Their kinsmen are not warning them of their great danger, and the bull-like heirs of Bharata themselves seem unaware that they should beware!'

Kuntī's son, the lord of men, heard many such murmurings, but, in his modesty and adherence to *dharma*, he returned to gamble again. Despite what he knew, the hero of mighty wisdom set the gambling in motion once more, hoping that it would not lead to the destruction of the Kurus. 'How could a king such as I, maintaining my *dharma*,' he said, 'refuse when challenged? Śakuni, I gamble with you!'

'Horses and cows, including many milkers,' said Śakuni; 'limitless sheep and goats; elephants; treasure and gold; slaves and slave-girls – all these are staked in this our single wager for exile in the forest, sons of Pāṇḍu! Whoever is defeated, you or ourselves, must go and dwell in the forest! With this resolve let us gamble, bull-like heir of Bharata, on a single throw for exile in the forest.'

Kuntī's son gave him assent; Subala's son took up the dice; and 'I have won!' said Śakuni to Yudhiṣṭhīra.

[68] Kuntī's sons, defeated, turned their minds towards exile in the forest; one after another, they took antelope-skins for their upper garments. Then seeing those foe-tamers dressed in antelope-skins, stripped of their kingdom and setting out for the forest, Duhśāsana said, 'Now the wheel of noble King Duryodhana's rule rolls forward, and the Pāṇḍavas are humiliated and overtaken by utter disaster! Today the gods themselves have stepped forth along their smooth sky-paths, so

5 that we are better and older and greater than our enemies! Kuntī's sons have been plunged into hell, for a long time, for ever! They are stripped of their happiness and of their kingdom; they are lost for endless years! Pāṇḍu's sons, who have always laughed at the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the intoxication of their might, are now defeated and stripped of their wealth, and they are going to the forest! Let them cast off the bright armour they wore, and these shining, heavenly garments; let them all wear skins of *ruru* deer, for they assented to the wager with Subala's son! Always they fed their minds with the one thought: "In the three worlds there are no other men such as we." Now those same Pāṇḍavas will come to know themselves in adversity, barren as sterile sesame seeds!

'You are men of such spirit, O Kaurava; but do not imagine that these new garments confer any benefit upon you. Behold, the mighty Pāṇḍavas are dressed in sacrificial antelope-skins – but they have undergone no rite of initiation!'

10 'Wise King Drupada has done an ill deed in giving his daughter, the Pāñcāla princess, to the Pāṇḍavas, for Kuntī's sons are now eunuchs; they are no husbands for Draupadī! When you see them in the forest, daughter of Drupada, stripped of wealth and rank and forced to wear antelope-skins instead of fine clothes, what pleasure will be yours? Choose another husband, whoever you wish! All the Kurus assembled here are patient and forbearing, and they are very wealthy; so choose one of them for your husband! Do not let this reversal of fortune cause you pain! The Pāṇḍavas are barren; they are just like sterile sesame seeds, or leather effigies of animals, or grainless barley plants. Why should you wait upon the fallen sons of Pāṇḍu? It is wasted labour, like tending barren sesame seeds!'

15 Such were the insults that Dhṛtarāṣṭra's cruel son hurled at the Pāṇḍavas. When unforbearing Bhīma heard them, he reviled him loudly, and angrily checked him; he rushed at him, like a mountain lion at a jackal, and said, 'Vicious man! Your speech may give pleasure to the wicked, but it is not justified by any accomplishment on your part, for in the midst of these kings it is Śakuni's skill of which you boast! Well,

¹ See note to 2.66.18. The following verses make it clear that among the elements of the Pāṇḍavas' thirteen-year 'observance' is celibacy.

just as you strike here at our vital organs with the arrows of your words, so I shall remind you of them when I cut open your vital organs in battle! And as for your protectors, who follow you because they are in thrall to desire and greed, I shall dispatch them and their followers to the realm of Yama!'

As Bhīma spoke these words, clad in antelope-skins and overwhelmed with grief, but holding to the path of his *dharma*, the shameless Duhśāsana danced round him in the midst of the Kurus, calling out 'Cow! Cow!'

'Duhśāsana,' answered Bhīma, 'your talent is the cruel, the harsh, the vicious. Who but you could boast after acquiring wealth through deceit? May Kuntī's son, the wolf-belly, not attain the realms of the virtuous if he does not rip open your breast and drink your blood in battle! Once I have slain the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra before the very eyes of all their bowmen, then I shall soon find peace: I tell you this truthfully.'

Now, in his joy, foolish King Duryodhana amused himself by imitating Bhīma's lion-like walk as the Pāṇḍavas left the hall. The wolf-belly turned half round, and said, 'Fool! You achieve nothing by this, for I shall soon make my reply to you, and remind you of your deeds, by killing you and your followers!' Then, though he had seen himself slighted, Bhīma, mighty and proud, restrained his anger, for he was loyal to his king. In the assembly of the Kauravas, as he was leaving, he spoke these words: 'I shall slay Duryodhana; wealth-winner Arjuna will slay Karna; and Sahadeva will slay the cheating gamester Śakuni. And in the midst of this assembly I shall again pronounce my mighty vow – the gods will make it come true when we engage in combat – I shall kill this wicked Duryodhana with my club in battle, and trample his head into the ground with my foot! As for this cruel, wicked Duhśāsana, this self-styled hero, like a lion I shall drink his blood!'

'Bhīma,' said Arjuna, 'the resolve of the virtuous is not known through words alone: in the fourteenth year from now, they shall see what happens! The earth will drink the blood of Duryodhana, Karna, the wicked Śakuni, and Duhśāsana! At your command, O Bhīma, I shall slay in battle Karna, the speaker of envy, the instigator of wicked people! Arjuna promises, as a favour to Bhīma: with my feathered arrows I shall kill Karna and his followers in battle!'

'As for any other kings who are foolish enough to fight against me,