

recognized him he had approached Mārkandeya, who suggested he ask an owl that lived in the mountains. The owl passed him on to a crane that was even older than itself, and the crane to a yet older turtle; the turtle had recognized Indradyumna, who was then able to return to heaven.

DHUNDHUMĀRA

[192] — Yudhiṣṭhīra asks Mārkandeya why the Ikṣvāku king Kuvalāśva came to be known as Dhundhumāra, and Mārkandeya tells the story. — The seer Uttānka wins a boon from Viṣṇu; when he chooses devotion to dharma, Viṣṇu grants the boon and adds that he will also bring about the destruction of the demon Dhundhu by means of King Kuvalāśva.

[193] Kuvalāśva is the son of Brhadaśva, the Ikṣvāku king of Ayodhyā. When Brhadaśva retires to the forest, Uttānka goes to him and urges him instead to kill Dhundhu, a demon who is performing austerities in an attempt to overthrow the gods. [194] Brhadaśva promises that his son Kuvalāśva will carry out the task.

— At this point Yudhiṣṭhīra interrupts the story with a request to learn Dhundhu's origin, and Mārkandeya obliges. — Brahmā is born from a lotus that grows from the navel of the sleeping Viṣṇu; he is frightened by two demons, Madhu and Kaitabha, and wakes Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu and the demons exchange boons: his boon is that he will kill them, and their boon is that they will become his sons. Viṣṇu now beheads the two with his discus.

[195] Dhundhu is the son of Madhu and Kaitabha. Granted a boon by Brahmā, he chooses to be invulnerable to gods, demigods and demons; he then fiercely assails Viṣṇu and the other gods. It is at this time that Kuvalāśva and his twenty-one thousand sons attack him. They dig him out of his underground lair; when he burns them with his fire, Kuvalāśva douses the fire with water that streams from his body, and thus becomes known as Dhundhumāra, 'Killer of Dhundhu'. The gods give him boons and blessings. The Ikṣvāku line springs from the three of his sons who survive the encounter with Dhundhu.

THE FAITHFUL WIFE

[196] — Now Yudhiṣṭhīra questions Mārkandeya about the greatness of women and their fearsomely difficult dharma. Mārkandeya replies that a woman attains heaven not through any religious practice but through obedience to her husband, [197] and he relates the tale of the Brahmin Kauśika. — Kauśika curses a female crane when its droppings fall on him, and the bird falls dead. He then begs food from a village woman, but becomes enraged when she tends to her husband first. She maintains that her dharma is unqualified obedience to her husband, and tells Kauśika that he should overcome his anger; she advises him to visit a hunter living in Mithilā, who will proclaim dharma to him.

THE BRAHMIN'S CONVERSATION WITH THE HUNTER

[198] Kauśika travels to the prosperous city of Mithilā, where he finds the hunter selling meat in the slaughterhouse; the hunter takes him home. Kauśika deplores the hunter's occupation, but the hunter explains that it is his hereditary calling, which it would be wrong to turn away from. People should follow their dharma and avoid wrongdoing.

[199] The hunter explains that his terrible profession is a consequence of bad deeds in a previous life, which he is striving to destroy. Meat lawfully eaten does not pollute, and it is right to do perform one's own dharma as well as possible, even if the task be an unpleasant one. Whatever may be said about non-violence, life entails killing: merely to walk on the ground results in the death of creatures. But the person who is devoted to his job earns a good name. [200] There are many disparities between people's merit and their lot in life, and these result from their deeds in a previous birth. Questioned by Kauśika, the hunter tells him that creatures are reborn over and over again; they attain higher or lower births according to their past deeds. Only through dharma may one break the chain and reach freedom.

[201] The hunter describes how the wise man adheres to dharma and

avoids evil acts. Then he gives a brief account of the constitution of the world according to the Sāṃkhya philosophy. [202] At Kauśika's request he lists the elements and their properties, and expounds the importance of overcoming the senses. [203] Then he speaks of the three Sāṃkhya qualities: *tamas*, *Darkness*, leading to dullness and ignorance, *rajas*, *Passion*, leading to engagement with the world, and *sattva*, *Goodness*, leading to wise detachment. Next he discourses on the different vital airs that energize the body, and emphasizes that only through virtue and restraint may final release be won.

[204] Kauśika praises the hunter's wisdom; the hunter invites him to visit his parents. Then he speaks of the honour in which he holds his parents, and the care which he lavishes upon them. [205] He chides Kauśika for leaving home without taking his own parents' leave, and urges him to return quickly and do them due honour. Now Kauśika blesses the hunter for saving him from falling into evil, and asks him the reason for his present lowly status. The hunter explains that in his former life he was a Brahmin, but he had shot an ascetic by mistake when hunting. The wounded man had cursed him to be reborn as a hunter. [206] The hunter had begged forgiveness, and the ascetic mitigated the curse by permitting him to be deeply virtuous in his hunter's birth. Kauśika, having heard all this, returns to his home and honours his parents.

ĀNGIRAS

[207] — Yudhiṣṭhīra asks Mārkaṇḍeya to tell him about Āngiras and the many different ritual fires, and about the birth of Skanda the war god. Mārkaṇḍeya narrates. — The god of Fire, Agni, withdraws to the forest to perform austerities, and in his absence the sage Āngiras takes on his role. Agni is dismayed, but Āngiras persuades him to resume his primacy and to make Āngiras his first-born son. Āngiras himself now has a son, Bṛhaspati. The various fires are all descendants of Āngiras: [208] his own sons and daughters are all ritual fires, [209] and many more ritual fires are born in Bṛhaspati's lineage. [210] The fire of asceticism, Tapas, is born as the result of the austerities performed by mighty sages, [211] and further fires are born in Tapas's lineage.

[212] Agni hides in the ocean, but is given away by fish: he curses them to become the food of other creatures. He hides in the earth, then again in the ocean; Āngiras brings him back.

[213] — Having spoken of the origin of the fires, Mārkaṇḍeya now tells of the birth of Skanda. — The gods and demons are striving against one another, and the demons have the upper hand. Indra sets out to find a hero who will rally the demoralized army of the gods. He encounters a woman being molested by the demon Keśin, and rescues her. She is Prajāpati's daughter Devasenā ('Army of the gods'), and she tells Indra that her husband will be a mighty hero. Indra decides that only Fire can father such a hero. A ceremony is performed to induce Fire to come forth from the sun. He does so, but is captivated by the wives of the seven seers and chooses to become the household fire so that he may see them every day; after some time, frustrated, he leaves for the forest.

Dakṣa's daughter Svāhā, who is in love with him, decides to go to him in the form of the seers' wives. [214] She visits him, assuming the forms of one after another of the wives of the seers in order to lie with him again and again. She cannot assume the form of Vasiṣṭha's wife Arundhatī, whose ascetic power and faithfulness is too great, so all in all she lies with him six times; each time she then becomes a bird to carry away his seed and deposit it in a lake on Mount Śveta. From the seed is born the six-headed Skanda, who attains full growth in four days; his roars and his might terrify the world. He splits open Mount Krauñca.

[215] Svāhā claims that Skanda is her own son, and Viśvāmitra establishes that this is the truth, but none the less the six seers leave their wives. The gods appeal to Indra; he sends the Mothers of the World to kill Skanda, but when they see him they adopt him as their son. Fire too comes to visit his child.

[216] Indra leads an attack on Skanda; Skanda breathes fire and burns the forces of the gods, who defect to him. When Indra's thunderbolt strikes Skanda's side, it produces another terrifying young man, Viśākha. Indra too now takes refuge with Skanda. [217] The thunderbolt's impact produces yet more male beings: they are to be Skanda's companions. The daughters of the fire named Tapas come to Skanda and ask to become Mothers of the World; he grants their wish.

[218] The goddess Śrī herself now pays honour to Skanda, and the

seers appeal to him to replace Indra; even Indra pleads with him, but he refuses, and asks instead to command the army of the gods. After his installation, Rudra honours him; he comes to be known as Rudra's son, since Fire is known as Rudra and permeated by Rudra. Now Indra brings in Devasenā, and Skanda is married to her. [219] The six seers' wives approach Skanda and ask to be his mothers. He agrees, and they become the constellation of the Kṛttikās. The Mothers of the World ask to replace the earlier Mothers and to devour their children. Skanda appoints them to be the diseases that afflict children up to the age of sixteen. [220] Svāhā asks to stay always with Agni; Skanda grants this. Then at Brahmā's urging he goes and honours his father Śiva.

[221] Śiva now sets off in a magnificent procession of the gods. As they go they are attacked by an enormous force of demons. At first Indra's troops are able to withstand them, but then a mighty demon named Mahiṣa joins the assault, brandishing a mountain. The gods flee, but Skanda kills Mahiṣa and the rest of the demons. Indra pays him great honour.

DRAUPADĪ'S CONVERSATION WITH SATYABHĀMĀ

[222] Kṛṣṇa's chief queen Satyabhāmā asks Draupadī how she keeps the Pāṇḍavas faithful to her: does she use spells or potions? Draupadī replies that she decries such methods; she waits dutifully upon her five husbands. Before Yudhiṣṭhīra's downfall she was responsible for the running of the whole imperial household. [223] She tells Satyabhāmā that she should similarly devote herself fully to Kṛṣṇa, who will then give her his love. [224] Kṛṣṇa, who is ready to leave, now summons Satyabhāmā. Before joining him, she assures Draupadī that she and her husbands will regain what they have lost.

THE TOUR OF THE CATTLE-STATIONS

[225] One day a Brahmin who has visited the Pāṇḍavas in the forest goes on to see Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and tells him of their circumstances. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is grieved and

deeply troubled, for he fears that in time the Pāṇḍavas will seek their revenge and overwhelm the Kauravas.

[226] Karṇa and Śakuni urge Duryodhana to make the most of his good fortune and the distress of his enemies: he should lead a party to observe the Pāṇḍavas in their forest exile and savour their misery. [227] Duryodhana likes this plan, but fears that Dhṛtarāṣṭra will not permit him to go. He tells Karṇa and Śakuni to devise a way round the problem; Karna proposes a tour of the cattle-stations, and this is agreed on. [228] The proposal is put to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He objects that it might lead to an encounter with the Pāṇḍavas, but Śakuni persuades him and he gives his reluctant assent. Duryodhana now travels towards Lake Dvaitavana with a large body of followers.

[229] Duryodhana completes his inspection of the cattle and continues towards Lake Dvaitavana, hunting and pursuing other enjoyments along the way. But when an advance party reaches the lake they are sent back by the Gandharvas whose king is encamped there. [230] When Duryodhana learns what has happened he angrily instructs his troops to attack the Gandharvas. A great battle takes place: many Gandharvas are slain, but their king Citrasena uses his illusory weapons against the Kauravas, who flee in large numbers. Karṇa alone withstands the attack, but in time his chariot is destroyed and he is forced to flee. [231] Duryodhana holds his ground, but is taken prisoner along with a number of his supporters. The rest flee and seek refuge with Yudhiṣṭhīra. Bhīma speaks harshly of Duryodhana and his advisers, till Yudhiṣṭhīra silences him.

[232] Yudhiṣṭhīra instructs his brothers to free Duryodhana, using as little force as possible. [233] Cheered on by the Kauravas, the four Pāṇḍavas ride out against the Gandharvas. They try to achieve their aims through light skirmishing and parley, but to no avail. A violent battle begins. [234] The Pāṇḍava brothers kill huge numbers of Gandharvas, Arjuna using his celestial weapons to great effect. Citrasena, concealing himself, uses his powers of illusion against Arjuna, who battles back fiercely. Overpowered, Citrasena now reveals himself to his old friend¹ and the fighting comes to an end.

[235] Citrasena explains why Duryodhana was taken prisoner; Arjuna none the less demands that he be freed. Yudhiṣṭhīra thanks the Gandharvas and gives them leave to depart, and Indra revives their fallen comrades. Yudhiṣṭhīra now upbraids Duryodhana for his behaviour and sends him home.

¹ See 3.45.

[236] Duryodhana travels to Hāstina-pura in shame. On the way, Karna congratulates him on his victory; [237] Duryodhana explains that his release was not his own doing, and describes to Karna the Pāñdavas' battle against the Gandharvas. [238] He reveals the humiliation of his rescue at the hands of those he has wronged, and announces that he intends to fast to death; Duhśāsana shall rule in his place. Duhśāsana and Karna do their best to dissuade him. [239] Śakuni too tries to cheer him, but he is adamant; he sits and begins his fast. Meanwhile the demons have learnt of his intention, which will harm their cause. They send a woman named Kṛtyā to fetch him to them in the underworld, and she does so.

[240] The demons instruct Duryodhana: he was created for them by Śiva and the Goddess, and they will ensure his victory. Kṛtyā returns Duryodhana to the place where he had started his fast. In the morning Karna urges him to abandon thoughts of dying, and he arises, full of resolve, and rides in splendour into his city. [241] Bhīṣma scolds him over his shameful behaviour and advocates making peace with the Pāñdavas, but Duryodhana and his followers simply laugh at him and walk away.

Now Duryodhana tells his followers that he wishes to perform the royal consecration, but his household priest explains that this cannot be done while Yudhiṣṭhira lives. However, there is an alternative and equal rite, in which the sacrificial enclosure is ploughed with a plough made of gold brought in tribute. Duryodhana orders arrangements to be made for its performance.

[242] Invitations are sent out to kings and Brahmins, and a messenger is also sent to Dvaitavana to invite the Pāñdavas. Yudhiṣṭhira will not attend, as his term of exile is not yet complete. The rite is performed, [243] and Duryodhana returns home. Karna congratulates him and bids him look forward to the day when the Pāñdavas are slain and he can perform the royal consecration itself; and he vows to kill Arjuna. News of this vow reaches Yudhiṣṭhira and causes him much anxiety.

THE DREAM DEER

[244] Yudhiṣṭhira has a dream in which he is approached by weeping deer. When he asks them what troubles them, they answer that they are the few deer to have survived the Pāñdavas' skilful hunting, and they ask him to move elsewhere so

that their numbers may increase once more. In the morning he and his brothers leave for Kāmyaka.

THE BUSHEL OF RICE

[245] Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa visits the Pāñdavas; seeing their sufferings, he discourses to them on the importance of maintaining equanimity through good and bad fortune. Yudhiṣṭhira asks him whether giving or asceticism carries the greater benefit in the next life; Vyāsa replies that giving is superior, [246] and tells the story of Mudgala, who lived off grains of rice he gleaned and yet gave food generously to others. He was visited by the seer Durvāsas in the form of a naked madman; Durvāsas ate all of Mudgala's food for six days running, and yet Mudgala continued to give without ill feeling. Durvāsas now praised Mudgala highly and told him that he had earned a place in heaven, but when the gods' messenger arrived to take him there he asked first to know more of the nature of life in heaven. [247] The messenger was amazed, but described the delights of heaven to Mudgala; he also described how, once the merit that earns a person a place in heaven is exhausted, he falls back to earth to suffer rebirth as a human. Mudgala now declined the offer. Instead he practised total serenity until he attained eternal release. Vyāsa tells Yudhiṣṭhira that he too should not grieve, and assures him that he will regain his lost kingdom. Then he leaves.

THE ABDUCTION OF DRAUPADĪ

[248] One day while the Pāñdavas are out hunting, King Jayadratha of Sindhu passes by the hermitage where they are staying; he sees Draupadī and desires her. He sends his companion Kotikāśya to find out who she is.

[249] Kotikāśya addresses Draupadī. He praises her beauty, names all the princes who are travelling in his party, and asks her to identify herself. [250] Draupadī modestly answers him, and explains that her five husbands will soon be home; she invites the travellers to stay and await their return. [251] Now Jayadratha himself visits her; she greets him courteously. He asks her to abandon her husbands and be his wife. Furious, she refuses. [252] She

warns Jayadratha not to incur the enmity of the Pāṇḍavas, but he drags her into his chariot. Dhaumya follows among the footsoldiers as he carries her off.

[253] Meanwhile, the Pāṇḍavas observe bad portents and return from their hunt. They find Draupadī's maid servant in tears; she tells them what has happened and they set out in pursuit. They catch up with Jayadratha's army; Dhaumya calls out to them to attack.

[254] Jayadratha asks Draupadī to identify her husbands to him, and she does so. Then the Pāṇḍavas attack. [255] Jayadratha's supporters are slaughtered, and he himself flees for the forest. Draupadī is rescued, and Bhīma and Arjuna prepare to pursue Jayadratha, but Yudhiṣṭhīra stops them, reminding them that he is married to Dhṛitarāṣṭra's daughter Duḥśalā. However, Draupadī is enraged and insists that they should go. Yudhiṣṭhīra now returns with Draupadī and the twins to the hermitage. Bhīma and Arjuna ride after Jayadratha; Arjuna shoots his horses, and he runs away. Bhīma follows him; as he does so, Arjuna cautions him not to kill him.

[256] Bhīma catches up with Jayadratha, seizes him by the hair and beats him, kicking him in the head. Arjuna intervenes, and Bhīma contents himself with shaving Jayadratha's head with a crescent-shaped arrow, leaving five tufts of hair, and forcing him to acknowledge himself the Pāṇḍavas' slave. Then he parades him before Yudhiṣṭhīra and Draupadī, before releasing him on their instructions. Jayadratha, shamed, performs austerities to secure a boon from Śiva. He asks to be able to defeat all five Pāṇḍavas in battle, but Śiva tells him that is impossible; however, he will be able to check each of them in battle, save for Arjuna, who is under Kṛṣṇa's protection.

RĀMA

[257] Yudhiṣṭhīra speaks to Mārkaṇḍeya. He bemoans his fate, and asks whether any other man was ever so unfortunate. [258] Mārkaṇḍeya responds with the name of Rāma, who suffered unmatched woe. Yudhiṣṭhīra asks to hear about him, and Mārkaṇḍeya relates. — The Ikṣvāku king Daśaratha has four sons by his three queens: Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Śatrughna and Bharata. King Janaka of Videha has a daughter Sītā, who is married to Rāma.

The Rākṣasa Rāvaṇa is descended from Prajāpati through Pulastyā.

[259] Rāvaṇa has a brother, Kumbhakarna, two half-brothers, Vibhīṣaṇa and Khara, and a half-sister, Śūrpaṇakhā. The first three perform fierce austerities until Brahmā grants each of them a boon. Rāvaṇa chooses to be invincible to gods, demons, and other supernatural beings; Kumbhakarna chooses to sleep long; Vibhīṣaṇa chooses virtue and the Weapon of Brahmā, to which Brahmā adds immortality. Rāvaṇa now expels his older half-brother, Kubera, from Laṅkā; Vibhīṣaṇa goes with him.

Rāvaṇa becomes king of the Rākṣasas, and the gods themselves fear him. [260] The Fire god, speaking on behalf of the immortals, appeals to Brahmā for help. Brahmā explains that Rāvaṇa is invincible to all but men, and reveals that Viṣṇu has already taken human form to destroy him. He instructs them all to beget sons on bears and monkeys to help Viṣṇu, and they do so. He also instructs a female Gandharva named Dundubhī to take the form of the hunchback Mantharā, and tells her what she must do.

[261] Daśaratha determines to make Rāma prince regent. Mantharā incites Kaikeyī, mother of Rāma's half-brother Bharata; Kaikeyī goes to Daśaratha and claims a boon he had formerly promised her. She demands that Bharata becomes prince regent instead, and that Rāma is exiled to the forest. Rāma leaves with his brother Lakṣmaṇa and his wife Sītā. After a time, Daśaratha dies and Kaikeyī tells Bharata to take the kingship, but he will not do so. He visits Rāma in his forest exile, and then rules from Nandigrāma with a pair of Rāma's sandals before him.

Meanwhile Rāma does battle with Khara in a dispute occasioned by Śūrpaṇakhā; he slays Khara and fourteen thousand Rākṣasas, and Śūrpaṇakhā presents herself to Rāvaṇa with her nose and lips cut off. Rāvaṇa determines on vengeance. [262] He commands his former minister Mārīca to help him, and Mārīca reluctantly agrees. The two of them travel to Rāma's hermitage, where Rāvaṇa takes the form of an ascetic and Mārīca takes the form of a golden deer.

Sītā sees the deer and sends Rāma to catch it, leaving Lakṣmaṇa on guard. After a chase Rāma recognizes the deer as a Rākṣasa and kills it with a an arrow; the dying Mārīca calls out in Rāma's voice. Sītā hears and is fearful; Lakṣmaṇa assures her that all is well, but she insists that he follow Rāma. Now Rāvaṇa enters. Sītā offers him hospitality, but he resumes his own shape and invites her to become his wife. When she

scornfully rejects him, he drags her away by the hair and carries her off through the sky. The vulture Jatāyu sees Sītā being abducted, [263] and attacks Rāvaṇa, who cuts off his wings. As she is carried away, Sītā tries to leave a trail of ornaments; she drops her robe into a group of five monkeys.

Meanwhile Rāma meets Lakṣmaṇa, and the two of them learn what has happened from the dying Jatāyu. Lakṣmaṇa is seized by the Rākṣasa Kabandha, and despairs; Rāma encourages him, and together they kill Kabandha. From the body emerges the Gandharva Viśvāvasu, who had been cursed to be born as a Rākṣasa: he advises the brothers to seek the help of the monkey Sugrīva.

[264] Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa travel to Lake Pampā; on the nearby Mount Rśyamūka they meet Sugrīva, who shows them Sītā's robe. Rāma installs Sugrīva as king of all the monkeys and promises to kill his brother Vālin, while Sugrīva promises to rescue Sītā. They all travel to the Kiskindhā forest, where Sugrīva roars in challenge to Vālin. Vālin's wife tries to prevent Vālin from fighting his brother, but he insists. Neither monkey can overcome the other, but, at a signal, Rāma shoots Vālin. Sugrīva takes over his kingdom.

In the meantime Rāvaṇa has placed the grieving Sītā in a palace near a grove of aśoka trees. Her Rākṣasa guards threaten to eat her, but she replies that she would prefer this to life without Rāma, the only man she will have. The guards go to report her words to Rāvaṇa, and in their absence a Rākṣasa woman named Trijatā passes on to her news of Rāma's doings; she assures her that he will soon rescue her and defeat Rāvaṇa. [265] Rāvaṇa visits Sītā and asks her to become his queen, but she will have nothing to do with him. He promises not to approach her as long as she is unwilling, and leaves.

[266] Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa continue to stay with Sugrīva, but Rāma is impatient and sends Lakṣmaṇa to Sugrīva to find out what steps he is taking. Sugrīva answers that he has sent monkeys out in every direction to seek for news of Sītā; they are due to return soon. The monkeys that travelled to the north, east and west do return, but without news; however, there is no sign of the party that went south. After two months there is word of them suggesting they have been successful, and soon they arrive, led by Hanumān, who confirms that they have located Sītā, and tells of their doings. They had despaired on reaching the shore of the

ocean, but then Jatāyu's brother Sampāti had appeared and told them the whole story of his brother's death and Rāma's misfortune; he had also spoken of Laṅkā, and said that he was sure Sītā would be found there. Hanumān now leapt the ocean; he found Sītā, and reassured her, and she gave him a jewel as a token. Then he set the city ablaze and returned home.

[267] Great armies of monkeys now come to aid Rāma. They set out and reach the shore. Rāma warns the ocean that if it does not make way he will use celestial weapons to dry it up. The ocean replies that if it does so for Rāma, it may have to do so for others also; better that the skilled monkey Nala should construct a causeway. Rāma instructs Nala, and the causeway is built. Vibhīṣaṇa arrives; Rāma installs him as king of the Rākṣasas. Then they cross over to Laṅkā.

Now Rāma sends the monkey Angada to Rāvaṇa. [268] Angada visits Rāvaṇa in his fortified stronghold of Laṅkā. He warns him that if he does not release Sītā there will be a massacre of the Rākṣasas. Furious, Rāvaṇa has him seized, but he escapes back to Rāma, who attacks Laṅkā. There is great slaughter on both sides, but it is Rāma who succeeds in destroying the city.

[269] Rāvaṇa leads his forces against Rāma, and there is a fierce battle. [270] The Rākṣasa Prahasta attacks Vibhīṣaṇa, and is slain by him. Dhūmrākṣa assails the host of monkeys; Hanumān overcomes him and kills him. When Rāvaṇa hears the news he has the sleeping Kumbhakarṇa woken and sends him out to fight together with Vajravega and Pramāthin. [271] Kumbhakarṇa laughs at the monkeys' assaults on him and takes Sugrīva captive, but Lakṣmaṇa kills him with the Weapon of Brahmā. Then he turns his attack on Vajravega and Pramāthin, who fight back until they are slain by the monkeys Hanumān and Nīla.

[272] Hearing of the deaths of his generals, Rāvaṇa now sends his son Indrajit into battle. Indrajit fights fiercely against Lakṣmaṇa and Angada; then, when his chariot and horses are destroyed, he becomes invisible and showers arrows upon Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and they fall to the ground.

[273] Vibhīṣaṇa rescues the two brothers and Sugrīva frees their bodies of arrows. Vibhīṣaṇa presents them with water sent by Kubera that allows them to see what is invisible. Now Lakṣmaṇa does battle with Indrajit once more and slays him. When Rāvaṇa sees that Indrajit's chariot is empty

he determines to kill Sītā, but the wise Rāksasa Avindhya stops him and urges him to kill Rāma instead.

[274] Rāvaṇa rides out in his chariot to see his army worsted by the monkeys. He uses his illusory power to create thousands of Rāksasa warriors, but these are slain by Rāma. Then he creates numerous Rāksasa doubles of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa themselves, but once again Rāma kills them. Now Indra's charioteer Mātali arrives in his chariot and urges Rāma to mount it and slay Rāvaṇa. At first doubtful whether this is a further illusion, Rāma is persuaded by Vibhīṣaṇa. Mātali drives him to Rāvaṇa, and the two do battle; Rāma kills Rāvaṇa with the Weapon of Brahmā. Nothing is left of the Rāksasa's body, not even ash.

[275] The gods and other celestials pay honour to Rāma, who hands Laṅkā over to Vibhīṣaṇa. Avindhya brings Sītā to Rāma, but he will not take her back, for she has been in another man's hands. She calls on the gods to testify to her innocence, and they do so. Daśaratha too appears and tells Rāma that he should return to Ayodhyā and rule. Rāma now takes Sītā back. Brahmā offers him a boon; he chooses for the fallen monkeys to come back to life. Sītā grants Hanumān that his life shall last as long as Rāma's fame. They all return across the causeway, and Rāma rewards the monkeys and dismisses them. He installs Arīgada as prince regent in Kiśkindhā, then receives his own kingship back from his brother Bharata. He performs ten horse sacrifices.

[276] — Having finished narrating the story of Rāma, Mārkaṇḍeya now warns Yudhiṣṭhīra not to grieve. He has the support of his mighty brothers, who rescued Draupadī when she was abducted, whereas Rāma had to face a dreadful Rāksasa in battle, with only monkeys for his companions.

SĀVITRĪ

Yudhiṣṭhīra spoke:

[277] Great sage, I do not grieve for myself, or for these my brothers, or for the loss of my kingdom, so much as I grieve for Drupada's daughter here. When wicked men tormented us in the gambling match, it was Draupadī who saved us, and then Jayadratha

abducted her from the forest by force. Has anyone before ever seen or heard of such a woman as this daughter of Drupada, so noble and so intent on serving her husbands?

Mārkaṇḍeya spoke:

King Yudhiṣṭhīra, hear how the princess Sāvitrī attained all the greatness to which well-born women may aspire.

There was once a king of Madra who was a most righteous man. He supported the Brahmins and granted shelter to those in need; true to his word and highly disciplined, he performed many sacrifices and gave many gifts. He was a skilful ruler, and loved alike by town and country people. This prince was named Aśvapati: he was devoted to the well-being of all creatures, merciful and truthful, but he was childless, and, as his life wore on, grief afflicted him. He performed strict observances to get a child, restricting his eating to certain times, and remaining chaste and disciplined: truest of kings, he offered a hundred thousand oblations accompanied by the Sāvitrī prayer,¹ and ate only in the sixth watch of each day. He maintained these observances for eighteen years, O king; then, at the conclusion of the eighteenth year, the goddess Sāvitrī was satisfied, and showed herself to the king in her own form.

Joyfully arising from the agnihotra offering, the boon-granting goddess addressed the prince: 'Prince, I am pleased with your pure chastity, your self-control, your observances, and your whole-hearted devotion to me. Choose whatever boon you desire, King Aśvapati of the Madras! And may you never fail in dharma.'

Aśvapati answered, 'It was out of my desire for dharma that I undertook this quest for children. O goddess, may I have many sons to further my line! This is the boon that I choose, O goddess, if you are pleased with me, for the Brahmins tell me that offspring is the highest dharma.'

'I already knew this purpose of yours, O king,' said Sāvitrī, 'and had requested Brahmā for sons on your behalf; and from the favour that the self-born lord bears towards you here on earth, you will

¹ *Rgveda Samhitā* 10.3.62.

very soon have a resplendent daughter, good sir. Do not make any kind of answer, for I am pleased with you, and I tell you this through Brahmā's generosity.'

The king gave his assent to Sāvitrī's words, beseeching her once more, 'May it be soon!' Then, when Sāvitrī had disappeared, he returned home and lived happily in his kingdom, ruling his subjects according to *dharma*.

Now after some time had passed, that king, keeper of his word, made his virtuous eldest queen pregnant. The child grew within the princess of Mālava, O bull-like heir of Bharata, like the moon in the sky during the bright fortnight, and when her time came, she gave birth to a lotus-eyed daughter. Delighted, the king performed the rites for her, and since she was the gift of Sāvitrī who had been pleased with his offerings, Sāvitrī was the name that he and the priests gave her.

The king's daughter grew like Śrī herself in bodily form, and in time the girl became a young woman. When people saw her with her slender waist and full hips, like a golden image, they thought a young goddess had appeared. Her eyes were like lotus-petals and she blazed with splendour; and yet no one would wed her, for her splendour kept them back.

Now once, on the occasion of the moon's change of phase, she fasted, bathed her head, approached the gods with oblations in the proper manner, and bade the priests recite; then, lovely as Śrī herself, she took the remaining flowers to her noble father. First she paid her respects at her father's feet and presented the flowers to him, and then that lady of fine hips stood at the king's side, joining her hands together. Seeing his daughter, divinely beautiful and of marriageable age, and yet unwooed by suitors, the king grew sad. 'Daughter,' he said, 'it is time for you to be married, but no one has asked me for you; so choose a husband for yourself, a man your equal in virtues. Tell me what man you wish for, and I shall give you to him when I have made enquiries. Choose as you wish, for I have heard this said by priests reciting from the instruction on *dharma*, and you too should hear it, O fair one, as I repeat it: "Blameworthy the father who does not give away

his daughter, blameworthy the husband who does not lie with his wife, and blameworthy the son who does not protect his mother after her husband's death."¹ Now you have heard these words of mine, hasten to find a husband: act so that I may not become blameworthy in the eyes of the gods!'

After speaking to his daughter, he appointed aged ministers and urged them to accompany her. Modestly, the spirited girl paid her respects at her father's feet; having heard his command she set out without hesitation. Accompanied by elderly aides, she mounted a golden chariot and set out for the lovely forest hermitages of the royal seers; and there, my son, she visited every hermitage in turn after first paying her respects at the feet of those worthy elders. In this manner the king's daughter travelled to one after another residence of leading Brahmins, distributing wealth in all the sacred bathing-places.

[278] The Madra king was seated in his hall engaged in conversation with Nārada, O heir of Bharata, when Sāvitrī and the ministers arrived back at her father's house after visiting every single hermitage. Seeing her father seated with Nārada, the lovely woman paid her respects to both by bowing her head at their feet. Nārada asked, 'Where has your daughter been to, king, and where has she returned from? She is of marriageable age, so why do you not give her to a husband?'

Aśvapati replied, 'This was the very reason I sent her out. She has just now returned, divine seer, so let her say what husband she has chosen.'

Her father urged the lovely woman to tell her tale in full, and she, accepting his command as if it were that of a god, spoke as follows: 'There was in Śālva a righteous Kṣatriya king named Dyumatsena. After some time, he became blind; and once that wise man, whose son was still a child, had lost his sight, a neighbour who was an old enemy saw his opportunity, and seized the kingdom. With his wife and infant son he set out for the forest, and there Dyumatsena of mighty vows practised austerities. His son Satyavat, born in the

¹ Cited from *Manusmṛti* 9.4.

city but raised in a forest hermitage, is the one I have chosen in my heart for a husband, for he is suited to me.'

But Nārada said, 'Alas! Sāvitrī has unwittingly done a great wrong, O king, in choosing the virtuous Satyavat! His father speaks truth, his mother speaks truth, and this is why the Brahmins named him Satyavat ('Truthful'). As a child he loved horses, and used to make horses out of clay and draw pictures of horses, and so he is also known as Cītrāśva ('Dappled-horse').'

The king asked, 'Is Prince Satyavat, Dyumatsena's joy, now a man of ardour and intelligence? Is he forbearing? Is he brave?' 15

Nārada answered, 'He has the ardour of the sun, he is Br̥haspati's equal in intelligence; he is as brave as Indra and as forbearing as the earth.'

Now Aśvapati asked, 'Is Prince Satyavat generous? Does he support the Brahmins? Is he handsome and noble? Is he fair to look on?'

Nārada answered, 'In generosity to the limits of his ability he equals Samkṛti's son Rantideva; he supports the Brahmins and speaks the truth like Uśinara's son Śibi; he is as noble as Yayāti and as fair to look on as the moon; and in beauty Dyumatsena's mighty son is like one of the Aśvins.¹ He is restrained, he is gentle, he is brave; he is truthful and disciplined; he is friendly, he is free of envy; he is modest and steadfast. In short, he is described, both by those who are senior in austerities and those who are senior in good character, as being ever full of uprightness and possessed of firm resolve.'

'Blessed sir,' said Aśvapati, 'as you describe him to me, he is full of every virtue. Tell me also his faults, if he has any.'

'Satyavat has one fault, and no other,' replied Nārada. 'In one year from today, his life will reach its end and he will die.'

'Come, Sāvitri,' said the king. 'You must go and choose another, lovely woman, for his one fault is so great that it outweighs all his

¹ Rantideva was famous for his vast Vedic sacrifices and his munificent gifts to Brahmins; for Śibi and Yayāti see 1.70-88. The Aśvins were celebrated for their beauty (see for example 1.61.85).

virtues: blessed Nārada, whom the very gods honour, has told me that his span of life is short, and that in a year he will die.'

Sāvitri answered, 'Only once does an inheritance fall due; only once is a girl given in marriage; only once does one say, "I give you this!" These three things happen only once. Whether his span of life is long or short, whether he is full of virtues or of faults, I have chosen him once for my husband, and I shall not choose another. A thing is first decided with the mind, and then announced with the voice; finally it is carried out in actions. The mind is therefore my authority.'

Nārada said, 'Best of men, your daughter Sāvitri has made her mind up firmly, and there is no way in which she can be deflected from this *dharma*. The virtues possessed by Satyavat are found in no other man, and so I do indeed approve your daughter's marriage to him.'

'Blessed sir,' replied the king, 'the words you have spoken are true, and cannot be questioned. I shall do it as you say, sir, for you are my teacher.'

'Let there be no obstacle to the marriage of your daughter Sāvitri,' said Nārada. 'Now I must go. My blessings on you all.' And with these words Nārada ascended into the sky and returned to the highest heaven.

Now the king had the arrangements made for his daughter's wedding. [279] Paying heed to what had been said about her marriage, he collected together everything needed for the wedding, and then he summoned all the old Brahmins, the sacrificial and household priests. On the auspicious day the king set out with his daughter and went to Dyumatsena's hermitage in the pure forest. With the Brahmins he approached the royal seer on foot, and there he saw the noble blind king, seated on a mat of *kuśa* grass beneath a śāla tree. He greeted the royal seer with all the respect he merited, and, keeping his voice low, introduced himself.

Expert in *dharma*, Dyumatsena presented him with the guest-offering, a seat, and a cow; then king asked king the reason for his coming. Aśvapati told him the whole of his purpose and his obligation regarding Satyavat: 'This lovely daughter of mine, royal

seer, is named Sāvitrī. You understand *dharma*: follow your *dharma* and accept her as your daughter-in-law!

Dyumatsena said, 'We have lost our kingdom; we live in the forest and practise *dharma* as temperate ascetics. Your daughter does not deserve this. How will she tolerate the hardship of forest life in a hermitage?'

10 Aśvapati answered, 'Since my daughter knows, as I know myself, that both happiness and unhappiness are ephemeral, such a response is not fitting in my case. I have come to you with my mind made up, O king. Please do not destroy my hopes! Please do not reject me when I have come to you in friendship and affection and love. You are suited to me for a match, and I to you, so accept my daughter as your daughter-in-law and as Satyavat's wife!'

Dyumatsena said, 'Long ago I desired an alliance with you, but now I have lost my kingdom: this is why I hesitated. But let this purpose of yours – which I once longed for too – be fulfilled this very day! I long to have you as my guest.'

15 Then the two kings convened all the Brahmins who lived in that hermitage, and bade them perform the wedding in the proper manner. And Aśvapati, after giving his daughter and a fitting dowry, returned to his home, filled with the greatest joy. As for Satyavat, he rejoiced at having gained a wife endowed with every virtue, and she rejoiced at having gained the husband her heart desired. Once her father had left, she put aside all her ornaments and took bark garments and a cloak of brown. She pleased everyone with her attentive acts, her virtues, her modesty and self-control, and with her fulfilment of their every wish. Her mother-in-law was delighted with all the services she performed for her in matters such as dress; her father-in-law with her worship of the gods and her restrained speech; and her husband with her sweet tongue, her skill and her tranquil nature, as well as with her attentions to him in private.

20 In this fashion these good people passed some time living in that hermitage and practising austerities, heir of Bharata; but whether Sāvitrī was lying down or standing, by day or by night, the words that Nārada had spoken remained in her mind.

[280] Much time passed, until one day the time came when Satyavat was to die, O king. As Sāvitrī counted day after day, the words that Nārada had spoken remained constantly in her heart; now, thinking, 'He is to die in four days' time,' the lovely girl began a three-night observance, remaining standing by day and by night.

When the king heard of the young woman's hard vow, he was sorrowful. He arose, and spoke soothing words to Sāvitrī: 'This is a most demanding quest that you have undertaken, princess! Standing for three nights is extremely difficult.'

5 'Do not be troubled, father,' replied, Sāvitrī; 'I shall accomplish this vow. It is performed with resolve, and resolve attains results.'

Dyumatsena said, 'I certainly cannot tell you to break your vow; a person such as myself should more properly bid you to accomplish it.'

10 With these words the high-minded king fell silent, and Sāvitrī remained standing, looking as though she had been turned to wood. The day before her husband's death was due, bull-like heir of Bharata, she passed the night standing and grieving. Then when the sun was risen just two yards over the horizon, thinking, 'Today is the day,' she made an offering into the blazing fire, performed the morning rituals, and paid her respects, in order of seniority, to all the aged Brahmins and her parents-in-law, standing intently with her hands joined together. All the ascetics who lived in that forest hermitage pronounced upon her good and kindly blessings that she should not be widowed, and Sāvitrī, deep in contemplation, mentally accepted all that the ascetics said, thinking, 'May it be so!' The princess waited for the time and the moment to come, and thought about what Nārada had said, and she was filled with sorrow.

15 Then her parents-in-law spoke affectionately to her as she stood by herself: 'You have properly accomplished your vow in the prescribed manner. The time has now come to eat, and you should do so at once.'

But Sāvitrī answered, 'I shall eat when the sun has set and I have achieved my desire: this is the resolve and the compact that I have made in my heart.'

Now while Sāvitrī was speaking thus about taking food, Satyavat started out for the forest with an axe over his shoulder. Sāvitrī said to her husband, 'Please do not go alone! I shall come with you, for I cannot bear to part from you.'

20 Satyavat replied, 'You have never been into the forest before, and the way will be difficult for you, lovely girl. How will you go on foot when you are worn out from your vow to fast?'

'My fast has not exhausted me, and I feel no fatigue,' said Sāvitrī. 'Please do not forbid me to go, for I long to do so!'

Satyavat answered her, 'If you have a longing to go, then I shall do as you wish. But first bid farewell to my parents, so that I incur no fault.'

25 Then Sāvitrī of mighty vows approached her parents-in-law, and said, 'My husband here is going to the great forest to gather fruit. I ask permission from the lady and from my father-in-law to go out with him, for I cannot bear to be apart from him. Your son is setting out for the forest on account of his parents' agnihotra ritual, and so I may not keep him back, as I might if he set out otherwise. But almost a year has past, and I have not left the hermitage; now I have the greatest curiosity to see the forest in bloom.'

'Ever since her father gave Sāvitrī to be my daughter-in-law,' said Dymatsena, 'I do not remember her saying anything involving a request; so by all means let the young woman attain this desire of hers. But, daughter, do not neglect Satyavat on the way.'

30 Her parents-in-law both gave her leave, and the lady of high repute set out with her husband. She seemed full of mirth, but her heart was afflicted. Wide-eyed, she saw all round her the lovely woods, delightful and resounding with the cries of peacocks; and Satyavat would sweetly say to Sāvitrī, 'Look at the pure-flowing rivers and the splendid trees in blossom!' But wherever they went, the blameless girl watched her husband, for she remembered the sage's words and thought of him as dead already. She walked with gentle tread behind her husband, her heart torn in two, waiting for the time.

[281] With his wife brave Satyavat gathered fruit and filled a dish; then he split logs. As he was splitting a log, he started to

sweat, and his head began to ache from his labours. Tormented by fatigue, he went up to his beloved wife and said, 'My head has begun to ache from my labours, Sāvitrī, and I have pain in my limbs and my heart. I feel unwell, lady of measured speech: my head feels as if it is pierced by spikes, and I want to sleep. O fair one, I do not have the strength to stand.'

Now Sāvitrī went to her husband and embraced him; she sat on the ground and took his head in her lap. The poor girl thought over Nārada's words, and knew this day and hour and minute for the fated moment. Then all at once she saw a handsome man dressed in yellow clothes and wearing a crown. He was radiant and strong as the sun; his dark skin shone, and his eyes were red. Noose in hand, a terrifying figure, he stood next to Satyavat and looked straight at him.

10 As soon as she saw him, she gently laid down her husband's head and arose. Joining her hands together she spoke, heart trembling in her distress: 'I recognize you as a deity, for this is no human form. Lord, tell me, if you will, who you are and what you intend.'

He answered her, 'Sāvitrī, you are intent on serving your husband, and you have also gained ascetic power; therefore I speak with you. Fair lady, know that I am Yama. The life of your husband Prince Satyavat here has reached its end, and I shall bind and take him. This is what I intend.' Then after saying this, the blessed king of the ancestors proceeded as a favour to tell her properly his whole intention: 'This man is righteous and handsome, an ocean of virtues, and it would not be right for him to be taken by my servants; therefore I have come myself.'

15 Then from Satyavat's body Yama forcibly drew out a person the size of a thumb, bound by his noose and under his control. And with the life removed, that body ceased to breathe and lost its lustre; motionless, it was no longer fair to look on. Then, having bound him, Yama set off southwards; and Sāvitrī too, grieving, followed after Yama, a noble woman, intent on serving her husband and perfect in her vows.

Yama said, 'Turn back, Sāvitrī! Go and perform his funeral rites.

You have discharged your duties towards your husband; you have gone as far as you may go.'

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'Where my husband is taken,' replied Sāvitrī, 'or where he goes of his own accord, there I too must go: this is eternal *dharma*. And thanks to my austerities, my conduct towards my elders, my love for my husband, my observances, and your own favour towards me, my going is not impeded. Wise men who understand the truth of things declare that he is a friend who walks with one for seven steps, and with this friendship in mind I wish to say something: hear me.¹ Only the self-controlled go to the forest, whether to practise the householder's *dharma*, the student's life or the ascetic's exertions; and in their wisdom it is *dharma* that they proclaim. Therefore the virtuous say that *dharma* is paramount. With a single *dharma* that the virtuous approve, all people can travel that path; I do not seek a second *dharma*, or a third. Therefore the virtuous say that *dharma* is paramount.'

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Yama said, 'Turn back! But I am pleased with these words you have spoken, every consonant and vowel, every point of your argument. Choose any boon, other than the life of this man! I shall give you what you want in full, blameless lady.'

'My father-in-law has lost his kingdom and his sight,' replied Sāvitrī; 'he lives in the forest, in a hermitage. May the king regain his sight and become as mighty as the blazing sun through your favour.'

Yama said, 'I give you what you want in full, blameless lady: as you have spoken, so it shall be. But I see that you are fatigued by this journey. Turn back! Go, do not weary yourself.'

'How could I be weary when I am near my husband?' asked Sāvitrī. 'My fixed way lies where my husband is, and where you take my husband, there I shall go. Lord of the gods, listen while I speak once more. They say a single meeting with virtuous people is greatly to be desired, but better still is friendship with them; it is never fruitless to meet a virtuous man. Therefore one should live amongst the virtuous.'

¹ This speech of Sāvitrī is obscure.

Yama said, 'This most salutary speech that you have spoken to me pleases my heart and enhances the wisdom of the wise. Lovely girl, choose further a second boon, other than the life of this Satyavat!'

'The king, my wise father-in-law, was long ago robbed of his own kingdom,' answered Sāvitrī; 'may he regain it, and may the venerable man never stray from his *dharma*. This is the second boon I ask of you.'

Yama said, 'The king shall soon regain his own kingdom, and he will never stray from his *dharma*. Princess, now that I have granted you this wish, turn back! Go, do not weary yourself.'

'All beings on earth are governed by you and your ordinances,' replied Sāvitrī, 'and it is by ordinance that you bear them away, not from choice; hence, O god, you are known as Yama.¹ Listen to what I have to say. The eternal *dharma* of the virtuous is to do no harm to any creature by deed or thought or word, and to practise kindness and generosity. For the most part the world is like this, and men are as kindly as they can be; but it is only the virtuous who show compassion even to their enemies when they come before them.'

Yama said, 'These words you have spoken are like water to a thirsty man. Choose further whatever boon you wish, fair lady, other than the life of this Satyavat!'

'The king my father has no son,' answered Sāvitrī; 'may he father a hundred sons to extend his line. This is the third boon I ask of you.'

Yama said, 'Your father shall have a hundred radiant sons, fair lady, to extend his line. Princess, now that this wish has been granted, turn back, for you have come far down this road!'

'This is not far when I am near my husband,' replied Sāvitrī, 'for my heart rushes forward yet farther. So as you go along, listen once again as I say these words that come to me. You are Vivasvat's son of mighty energy,² so the wise call you Vaivasvata; all beings are

¹ The word for 'ordinance' is *niyama*.

² Vivasvat is a name of the Sun god.

pleased with your peace and *dharma*, so you are known on earth as Dharmarāja.

'People trust the virtuous more even than they trust themselves, and so above all everyone desires the friendship of the virtuous. Indeed, amongst all creatures it is friendship which gives rise to trust, and so above all people trust the virtuous.'

Yama said, 'Fair lady, never before have I heard such words as you have spoken, and I am pleased with them. Choose a fourth boon, other than the life of this man; then go!'

'May there be born to Satyavat and me,' answered Sāvitrī, 'a hundred mighty, heroic sons to continue the line for us both. This is the fourth boon I ask of you.'

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Yama said, 'A hundred mighty, heroic sons shall be yours, lady, to bring you joy. Now, princess, do not fatigue yourself; turn back, for you have come far down this road!'

'The virtuous always practise eternal *dharma*', replied Sāvitrī; 'the virtuous never know despair or anguish. The coming together of virtuous people is never fruitless; the virtuous have nothing to fear from the virtuous. Through their truth, the virtuous guide the sun through the sky; through their austerities, the virtuous support the earth. The virtuous are the way of the past and the future, O king; amongst the virtuous, the virtuous are never despondent. The virtuous work for others, expecting no return, for they always know that such behaviour has the approval of noble people. A favour shown to virtuous men is never vain: neither one's wealth nor one's honour will be lost through it. And since among the virtuous this is always, invariably, the case, therefore the virtuous are the protectors of all mankind.'

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Yama said, 'The more you speak of *dharma* so pleasingly and eloquently, and with such great significance, the more I feel the highest affection for you. Lady, you are a keeper of your word; now choose an incomparable boon!'

Sāvitrī answered, 'This gift of yours does not exclude any prize as did your other boons, bestower of honour. I choose my boon. Let this Satyavat live, for without my husband I am as good as dead. Deprived of my husband, I have no desire for happiness;

deprived of my husband, I have no desire for heaven; deprived of my husband, I have no desire for fortune; I cannot live without my husband. You yourself granted me the boon of a hundred sons, and yet you are taking my husband away. I choose my boon. Let this Satyavat live, and then your own word will come true!'

Now Yama Dharmarāja, Vivasvat's son, gave his assent and untied his noose; full of joy, he spoke these words to Sāvitrī: 'Lady, you are the delight of your family. Here is your husband; I have set him free and restored his health. Take him. He will achieve his aims and live with you a life of four hundred years, and he will gain fame in the world for righteously performing sacrifices. Satyavat shall beget a hundred sons on you, and they will all be Kṣatriya kings. They will father sons and grandsons of their own, and all of them will be for ever known on earth by your name. Your father too shall have a hundred sons by your mother Mālavī, and they and their sons and grandsons will be forever called Mālavas. Your brothers will be godlike Kṣatriyas.'

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After granting her the boon in this manner, Yama Dharmarāja of mighty energy sent Sāvitrī back; then he returned to his own home. Once he had left, Sāvitrī, having regained her husband, went to where his lifeless body lay. Seeing her husband on the ground, she went up to him and embraced him; she sat on the ground and took his head on to her lap. Then Satyavat recovered consciousness, and he spoke to Sāvitrī, looking lovingly at her again and again, like someone returned from a journey abroad: 'How long I have slept! Why did you not wake me? And where is that dark man who dragged me away?'

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'Indeed, bull-like hero,' answered Sāvitrī, 'you have slept long on my lap. The blessed god Yama who binds all creatures has gone. You are rested, noble prince, and sleep has left you, so arise if you are able. See, night has fallen!'

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Now that Satyavat had regained consciousness, he arose as if from a pleasant sleep. Then, seeing that the forest surrounded them on every side, he said, 'Lady of slender waist, I set out with you to gather fruit; then, as I was splitting a log, my head began to hurt. So severe was my headache that I could not stand for

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long, and I fell asleep on your lap: all this I remember, fair lady. You embraced me, and sleep took my mind; then I saw a terrible darkness, and a man of mighty power. If you know, lady of slender waist, then tell me what this was: was what I saw a dream, or was it real?

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'Night is setting in,' replied Sāvitrī. 'Tomorrow I shall tell you everything that happened, prince. For now, good sir, arise, arise; you are strict in your vows, so consider your parents! Night has fallen here, and the sun has set; nocturnal creatures are on the prowl, exultantly uttering their cruel cries, and the leaves are rustling as beasts roam the forest; in the south-west fierce jackals are howling horribly, making my heart tremble.'

Satyavat said, 'The forest is frightful to see, and it is covered in dense darkness. You will not recognize the path; you will not be able to go.'

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'Today there was a fire in this part of the forest,' answered Sāvitrī, 'and there is a dry tree still burning; flames appear from time to time as the wind fans them. I shall fetch fire and make a blaze all round us. We have these logs here. Do not be troubled if you cannot go, for I see you are still unwell, and you will not recognize the path in the dense darkness of the forest. If you agree we shall set out tomorrow at daybreak, when the forest is light again. Let us stay here for the night, sinless prince, if you approve.'

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Satyavat said, 'My headache has stopped, and my limbs feel well. By your favour, I wish to rejoin my mother and father, for I have never before returned so late to the hermitage. Before dusk comes my mother keeps me in, and even when I go out by day both my parents become anxious, and my father searches for me with the other residents of the hermitage. Often in the past my mother and father have been very unhappy and have scolded me for coming home late; so I wonder what state they are in now on my account. They will suffer much sadness until they see me again. They are old, and they love me deeply: before now they have told me, weeping at night in their great unhappiness, "Son, if we lose you, we shall not live a moment; our lives are assured just as long as you survive. We are old and blind, and you are our support; the family

line depends on you, and so do our funeral rites, our fame and our descendants."

'And it is true: my mother is old, and my father is old, and I am their support. What state will they be in if they do not see me tonight? I curse that sleep through which my father and my blameless mother have been brought to this distress on my account. And I too am in distress, facing a terrible calamity, for I could not live without my mother and father. Doubtless at this very moment my father, who sees through his wisdom, is distractedly questioning the residents of the hermitage one by one. Fair lady, I do not grieve for myself as I grieve for my father, and for my elderly mother who has followed her husband; today they will both suffer terrible affliction for my sake. I live only if they live. I must support them, and I must do what would please them, for that is why I live.'

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With these words the righteous Satyavat, who respected his parents and was loved by them, raised his arms and wept aloud in his unhappiness. Then virtuous Sāvitrī, seeing her husband so racked by grief, wiped the tears from his eyes and said, 'If I have performed austerities, if I have given gifts, if I have made offerings, then let this night be auspicious for my parents-in-law and my husband! I do not remember having ever spoken an untrue word, even in a trivial matter; by this truth let my parents-in-law survive this day!'

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Satyavat said, 'I want to see my parents. Sāvitrī, let us go at once! If I now find that some harm has befallen my mother or my father, I shall not live, lady of fine hips; in truth, I shall take my own life. If your mind is set on *dharma*, if you want me to live, if it is your duty to please me, then let us go to the hermitage.'

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Then lovely Sāvitrī arose. She tied up her hair and raised her husband to his feet, holding him in her arms. Satyavat stood up; he rubbed his limbs with his hands, looking all round, and cast a glance at the dish. But Sāvitrī said to him, 'Tomorrow you shall fetch these fruits. I shall carry this axe of yours for our safety.' She hung the laden dish from the branch of a tree, took up the axe, and came back to where her husband was. Then that girl with fine

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thighs laid her husband's arm over her left shoulder, and, putting her own right arm round his waist, gently set out.

Satyavat said, 'Timid lady, I come here frequently, and so the paths are known to me, and I can see them by the moonlight showing between the trees. We have reached the path where we gathered fruit. Fair lady, continue along the way by which we came; do not hesitate. And at this thicket of *palāśa* trees the path divides in two; continue by the way that goes north, and make haste! I am well, I am strong, I want to see both my parents.' With these words he hurried forward towards the hermitage.

[282] Meanwhile in the great forest Dyumatsena had regained his sight; he rejoiced to see everything with his own eyes. With his wife Śaibyā he visited all the hermitages, bull-like hero, and he became extremely troubled on account of his son. The couple went round hermitages, rivers, forests and lakes, searching in place after place; when they heard any sound they would look up, thinking that it was their son, and hurry forward in the belief that Satyavat and Sāvitrī were coming. Like mad creatures they rushed about, their feet bruised, grazed, and torn till they bled, their bodies pierced by *kuśa* grass and thorns. Then all the Brahmins who lived in those hermitages came and gathered round to calm them, before conducting them to their own hermitage. There aged ascetics stayed with the king and his wife, and soothed them with wonderful tales of the kings of old. But even when the old couple were calm once more, their longing to see their son prompted them to recall with great sadness his childhood doings. Racked with grief, they wept, and again and again they pitifully asked, 'Ah, my son, ah, my good daughter-in-law, where are you, where are you?'

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Suvarcas the ascetic said, 'As Sāvitrī his wife excels in austerities, self-control and proper conduct, so Satyavat is alive.'

Gautama said, 'I have studied the Vedas with their branches, and I have accumulated great ascetic merit; as a youth I practised holy celibacy, and I satisfied my teachers and the sacrificial fire; I have observed all the vows intently, living on nothing but air, fasting, and whatever else was proper for me; through my austerities I

know every person's intentions. Know this for truth: Satyavat still lives.'

His pupil said, 'As these words which have come from my teacher's mouth can never be false, so Satyavat is alive.'

The seers said, 'As Sāvitrī his wife bears all the auspicious marks indicating that she will not be widowed, so Satyavat is alive.'

Bhāradvāja said, 'As Sāvitrī his wife excels in austerities, self-control and proper conduct, so Satyavat is alive.'

Dālbhya said, 'As your sight has returned, and as Sāvitrī kept her vow and left without taking food, so Satyavat is alive.'

Māṇḍavya said, 'As the cries of birds and animals can be heard in an auspicious direction, and as you conduct yourself like a king, so Satyavat is alive.'

Dhaumya said, 'As your son possesses every virtue and is loved by the people, and as he bears marks indicating a long life, so Satyavat is alive.'

With these words the ascetics, who spoke only truth, comforted Dyumatsena; and, thinking over what they had said, he seemed to regain his resolve. Then, a moment later, Sāvitrī and her husband Satyavat reached the hermitage by night, and entered joyfully.

The Brahmins said, 'Today we see you with son and sight restored, and we all wish you well, lord of the earth. You are reunited with your son, you have seen Sāvitrī again, and you have regained your sight; we felicitate you on all three! The words of all of us come true, make no doubt: it will not be long before you prosper even more.'

Now, son of Kuntī, all the Brahmins lit a fire and took their seats next to King Dyumatsena; and Śaibyā, Satyavat and Sāvitrī, who were standing to one side, cast off their grief and sat down with the Brahmins' leave. Then, full of curiosity, all the ascetics who were sitting with the king asked Prince Satyavat, 'Sir, why did you not return sooner with your wife? Why did you come back in the middle of the night? What was your motive? You have given anxiety to your father and mother, and to us too, O prince. We know that there must be a reason: please tell us everything.'

'My father gave me leave to go into the forest with Sāvitrī,'

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replied Satyavat, 'but as I was splitting logs there I was seized by a headache, and I know that I slept long because of the pain – I have never slept for such a time before. We returned in the middle of the night to allay the anxiety of all of you, and for no other reason.'

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Gautama said, 'So you do not know how your father Dyumatsena suddenly regained his sight. Sāvitrī must tell us this. Sāvitrī, I wish to hear it, for you understand causes and effects, and I know, Sāvitrī, that in splendour you are like the goddess Sāvitrī. You know how this has happened, so let the truth be told; if there is nothing that you must keep secret, then tell us!'

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'It is as you understand it,' answered Sāvitrī, 'and your intention shall not be thwarted; nor is there anything I must keep secret. Hear now the truth of this matter.

Noble Nārada foretold my husband's death, and today the day came, so I did not leave his side. As he slept, Yama approached in person with his servants; he bound him and took him away towards the region where the ancestors dwell. I praised that mighty god with truthful words, and he granted me five boons; listen while I tell of them. There were two boons for my father-in-law, his sight and his kingdom, and I received a hundred sons for my father, and a hundred for myself. I also received back my husband Satyavat, who will live a life of four hundred years, for I had resolutely performed a vow for the sake of my husband's life. I have told you in truth and in full how this happened, how this great grief of mine ended in joy.'

The seers said, 'The line of the king was sinking in a lake of darkness, overcome by disasters, when it was saved by you, a virtuous girl well born and well disposed, who had earned merit by practising *dharma*.'

Thus the assembled seers praised and did honour to that most excellent woman. Then they bade farewell to the king and his son, and went at once in peace and joy to their own homes.

[283] When that night had passed and the disc of the sun was risen, all the ascetics assembled after performing their morning rituals. The great seers did not weary of discoursing again and again to Dyumatsena on every aspect of the greatness that was

Sāvitrī's. Then, O king, all the counsellors arrived from Śālva to announce that their king had been killed by his own minister. They recounted what had happened: how, on hearing that the minister had killed him together with his associates and kinsmen, the forces of the enemy had fled, and how the people were now of one opinion towards King Dyumatsena – blind or sighted, he was to be their king. 'With this resolve we have been sent here, lord,' they said. 'Here are your chariots, and here your fourfold army. Set forth, O king, and blessings on you! Your victory has already been proclaimed in the city. Long may you hold the office of your ancestors!'

Then when they saw that their king had regained his sight and his bodily vigour, their eyes opened wide in amazement, and they prostrated themselves before him. The king now took his leave of the aged Brahmins who lived in the hermitage, and all of them did him honour. Then he set out for the city. And Śaibyā too set out with Sāvitrī in a brilliant, well-appointed chariot drawn by men and guarded by an army. The household priests joyfully consecrated Dyumatsena king, and consecrated his noble son as prince regent. Much time passed, and then the promised hundred sons were born to Sāvitrī to increase her fame, unretreating heroes all. And likewise a hundred of her own mighty brothers were born to Aśvapati king of Madra and Queen Mālavī.

Thus it happened that Sāvitrī rescued from calamity herself, her father and mother, her parents-in-law, and her husband's whole line; and in just the same way fair Draupadī here, who like Sāvitrī is a high-born woman renowned for her good character, will save you all.

Janamejaya spoke:

[284] Great Brahmin, when Lomaśa came at Indra's command to Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhīra, he said, 'Once ambidextrous Arjuna arrives here, I shall take away the keen fear that you have but never speak of.' Best of learned

men, what was that great fear concerning Karna of which the virtuous man would speak to no one?

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

Since you ask me, tiger-like king, I shall tell you this story. Listen to my words, best heir of Bharata. The twelfth year had passed and the thirteenth had arrived, when Indra, acting for the Pāṇḍavas' good, prepared to beg from Karna. Now the Sun god knew great Indra's purpose concerning Karna's earrings, great king, and so he approached Karna, speaker of truth and supporter of Brahmins, as the hero lay unsuspecting on a costly bed covered with rich draperies.

The Sun showed himself to him at night at the end of a dream, prince of kings, for he felt the greatest tenderness and love for his son. Assuming through his power the form of a Brahmin, a handsome Vedic scholar, he gently spoke these words to Karna to benefit him: 'Karna my son, best of all those who maintain truth, listen to what I have to say, for I tell you out of friendship what is for your greatest good, strong-armed hero. Indra will come to you in the guise of a Brahmin, Karna; he wants to take your earrings, for he wishes to benefit the Pāṇḍavas. Like the whole world, he knows your character: that when the virtuous beg from you, you always give and never request for yourself; when Brahmins ask you, son, you always give wealth and whatever else they name, and you never refuse. Indra knows that you are like this, so he himself will come to beg for your earrings and your armour. Even though he asks, you must not give the earrings to him; conciliate him as best you can, for this is your highest good. When Indra speaks of your earrings, son, you must persist in putting him off with many reasons and examples, and with gifts of wealth of many other kinds: jewels and women, pleasures and riches of every sort. If you give your lovely natural earrings, Karna, your life will be ended and you will come into the power of death. Bestower of honour, as long as you have your armour and your earrings you cannot be killed in battle by your enemies: take heed of what I say. For both these jewelled treasures arose from the *amṛta*;¹ therefore, Karna, you should guard them if your life is dear to you.'

¹ The elixir of immortality, gained by the gods when they churned the ocean: see 1.15.

'Who are you that speaks to me so,' asked Karna, 'showing me such utter friendship? Blessed sir, if you will, tell me who you are, dressed as you are like a Brahmin.'

The Brahmin answered, 'My son, I am the thousand-rayed Sun, and I am instructing you out of friendship. Act as I have said, for this is your greatest good.'

Karna said, 'It must indeed be my greatest possible good that the mighty lord of the rays tells me today for my welfare! Now listen to what I have to say: I propitiate you, granter of boons, and I speak from affection for you.'

'If I am dear to you, I should not be deflected from this vow of mine. All the world knows of my vow, O Sun: that I would certainly give my very life to the leading Brahmins. Best of sky-rangers, if Indra comes to me in the guise of a Brahmin to beg from me for the Pāṇḍavas' benefit, I shall give him my earrings and my excellent armour, so that my fame, renowned throughout the three worlds, may not perish. It is not fitting for a person such as myself to save my life at the cost of incurring dishonour; what is fitting, what the world approves, is an honourable death. So if the slayer of Bala and Vṛtra approaches me to beg, and asks for my earrings for the Pāṇḍavas' benefit, I shall give him both earrings and armour; to do so will bring me fame in the world, and bring him infamy!'

'I choose fame in the world, O Sun, even over life itself; for he that has fame gains heaven, whilst he that has none perishes. Like a mother, fame in the world gives men life, while infamy kills them even as they live. Lord of the world, here is an old verse sung by the creator himself, telling how a man's fame is his life: "Fame is what matters most to a man in the next world; an unsullied fame lengthens his life in this world."

'So by giving away these two parts of my body I shall gain eternal fame; and by giving a gift to Brahmins in the proper manner, by offering up my body in the sacrifice of battle, by doing a very difficult deed, and by conquering my enemies on the battlefield, I shall gain fame and nothing but fame. By freeing from fear the fearful who plead for their lives in battle, by releasing from great danger the old, the young and the Brahmins, I shall gain the highest glory in this world, O Slayer of

Rāhu.¹ So I shall give this greatest gift of alms to Indra in his Brahmin guise, O Sun god, and attain the highest rank in this world.'

[285] The Sun said, 'Karna, do not act to hurt yourself, your friends, your wives and sons, your mother and father! Living creatures wish to gain glory and lasting fame in the highest heaven without suffering bodily harm, O best of living creatures. But since you seek eternal fame at the cost of your life, it will take your life away, make no doubt. It is for the living that fathers, mothers and sons exert themselves to fulfil their duties. The same is true, tiger-like hero, of whatever other kinsmen one may have in the world, and also of kings; remember this. Fame is good for a living man, radiant prince, but what is the use of fame to a person who has died and been burnt to ash? A dead man cannot know fame; fame can be enjoyed only by the living. The fame of a dead man is like the garland on a corpse.'

'I tell you this to benefit you, because you are devoted to me, and because it is my duty to protect my devotees. When I know that someone feels the highest devotion towards me, strong-armed hero, I in turn become devoted to him; so you should do what I say. Furthermore, there is something very sacred here, something put in place by the gods. This is why I tell you this; you should act without hesitation. What the gods have made secret cannot be known by you, bull-like hero, and so I 10 cannot tell this secret to you. In time you will know it. But I will repeat what I have said: remember it, son of Rādhā. Do not give your earrings to Indra when he begs for them!'

'With your beautiful earrings, radiant hero, you are as lovely to see as the spotless moon in the sky between the two Viśākhā stars. Fame is good for a living man; remember this, and refuse Indra your earrings, son! You can dispel the desire that the king of the gods has for your earrings, sinless one, by repeating many kinds of arguments and reasons: thwart this plan of Indra's, O Karna, with well-argued words full of 15 sweetness and eloquence. You are forever vying with ambidextrous Arjuna, tiger-like hero, and heroic Arjuna will meet you in battle. As long as you have your earrings, Arjuna cannot defeat you on the battlefield, even if Indra acts as his weapon. So if you wish to defeat

Arjuna in battle, Karna, you must not give Indra these lovely earrings of yours!'

[286] Karna said, 'You know me, blessed lord of the rays: I am not devoted to any other god at all as I am to you with your most fiery beams. Not my wife, not my sons, not my self, not my friends are loved by me with such constant devotion as you, lord of the rays. There is no doubt that noble beings show loving devotion to their beloved devotees; this is well known to you, O Sun. And since your beloved devotee Karna recognizes no other deity in heaven, therefore you have spoken for my welfare, blessed sir. But I ask you once more with bended head, conciliating you again and again. I speak as before, lord of the fiery beams: please pardon me.'

'I do not fear death as I fear untruth! I would never hesitate to give even my life to any good person, and especially to a Brahmin. As for what you have told me concerning Arjuna Pāṇḍava, O Sun god, cast off the grief of anguish from your mind over Arjuna and me: I shall defeat Arjuna in battle. You know yourself, lord, that I too have mighty strength of arms received from Jamadagni's son Rāma and from noble Drona. Permit this vow of mine, O best of gods. If the god of the thunderbolt begs, I shall give my very life.'

The Sun said, 'If, son, you give these lovely earrings to the god of the thunderbolt, you should also speak to him to gain victory, hero of mighty strength. You should give the god of a hundred sacrifices your earrings under a stipulation, for as long as you have those earrings you cannot be killed by any being. It is because Indra seeks your destruction by Arjuna in battle, child, that he wants to take your earrings. So with pleasing words you should again and again propitiate the lord of the gods, who never fails in his purpose, and make your request: "Give me your unfailing Spear to destroy my enemies, and I shall give you, god of a thousand eyes, my earrings and my excellent armour." On this stipulation give Indra your earrings, and with the Spear you will slay your enemies on the field of battle, Karna; for the Spear of the king of the gods will not return to your hand without killing foes by hundreds and by thousands, strong-armed hero!'

With these words the Sun of a thousand rays suddenly vanished. Later, after his prayers, Karna related his dream to the Sun; he told

¹ See 1.17.

him in sequence everything that had passed between the two of them that night, as it was seen, as it took place, as it was said. On hearing it, the blessed Sun god, the slayer of Rāhu, said to Karna with the hint 20 of a smile, 'Just so!' Then Rādhā's son, the slayer of enemy heroes, knew it to be the truth, and he waited for Indra, longing only for the Spear.

[287] —Janamejaya wishes to know the secret to which the Sun referred, and to know more about Karna's earrings and armour. Vaiśampāyana narrates. — A Brahmin ascetic visits Kuntibhoja and asks for hospitality. Kuntibhoja instructs his adopted daughter Kuntī to look after him, impressing on her the need to satisfy his every wish. [288] Kuntī promises to give the Brahmin excellent care, and Kuntibhoja assigns her to him as his servant. [289] She discharges her duties so well that, after a year, the Brahmin offers her a boon. When she assures him that it is enough for her to have secured his good opinion, he provides her with a mantra with which she can summon any god to do her bidding. Then he vanishes.

[290] It is the time of Kuntī's period. She sees the sun rise and uses her mantra to summon the Sun god. He comes, and asks what she wants; she replies that she only summoned him out of curiosity and asks him to leave. However, he will not do so without first fathering a son on her; if she refuses he will curse her, her father and the Brahmin who gave her the mantra. [291] Kuntī secures the Sun's agreement that her virginity will be restored and that her son will possess divine earrings and armour, and lies with him.

[292] In the course of time, a son is born to Kuntī wearing earrings and armour. She places him in a basket and sets him afloat on the river Aśva with her blessings and lamentations. The basket travels downstream to the Gāṅgā.

[293] The childless wife of a Sūta named Adhiratha sees the basket; the couple open it and find the baby within, and adopt him as their son. He grows up under the names Vasuṣena and Viṣa; Kuntī learns of his identity through a spy. He becomes a great warrior, an ally of Duryodhana and an enemy of the Pāṇḍavas.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

Every midday, when Karna would stand in the water with hands joined together and praise the shining sun, O prince of kings, Brahmins would approach him there for wealth, and there was nothing that he would not

give them then. Now Indra became a Brahmin and approached him, saying 'Give alms!' Rādhā's son answered him, 'You are welcome!'

[294] When Karna saw the king of the gods arrive in the guise of a Brahmin, he welcomed him, not knowing what was in his mind. 'What may I give you?' Adhiratha's son then asked the priest. 'Women wearing golden necklaces? Or villages with many herds of cows?'

'I am not here to seek gifts of women wearing golden necklaces,' replied the Brahmin, 'nor of anything else to increase my pleasure. Let such things be given to those who ask for them. If you are true to your word, sinless hero, then cut off your natural armour and your earrings, and give them to me! This is what I want you to give me; do so at once, afflicter of your enemies! Of all prizes, this is the prize I judge the highest.'

'Land, women, cattle, well-irrigated fields,' said Karna, 'these I will give you, priest; but not my armour, not my earrings.' However, though Karna pleaded with him with many such words, the Brahmin would not ask for any other boon from him, best heir of Bharata. And though Karna conciliated him to the best of his ability, and paid him all due honour, that best of Brahmins wanted no other boon.

When that truest of Brahmins would not choose another boon, Rādhā's son laughed and spoke to him again: 'My natural armour and my earrings arose from the *amṛta*, priest, and because of them I cannot be killed by anyone in the three worlds. So I cannot give them. Bull-like Brahmin, accept from me the excellent gift of the vast kingdom of earth, secure and empty of enemies! If I am deprived of my earrings and my natural armour I shall be vulnerable to my enemies, truest of Brahmins.'

But then, when blessed Indra would still not choose another boon, Karna laughed and spoke to him once more: 'Lord of the highest gods, I already knew you, but it would not be proper for me to give a boon to you, O Indra, without gaining anything. For you are the lord of the gods in person, the lord and creator of all other beings, and you should be giving a boon to me! If, lord Indra, I give you my earrings and my armour, I shall become vulnerable and you will become laughable; therefore by all means take my earrings and my excellent armour, but as part of an exchange. I will not give them otherwise.'

Indra said, 'The Sun already knew that I was approaching you; no doubt he told you everything. By all means let it be as you desire, Karṇa. Aside from my thunderbolt, choose whatever you want.'

20 Then Karṇa joyfully went up to Indra. His aim achieved, he set his mind on the unfailing Spear, and made his choice: 'In exchange for armour and earrings, Indra, give me your unfailing Spear that slays hosts of enemies in the thick of battle!'

Indra seemed to reflect for a moment in his mind; then, lord of the earth, he spoke to Karṇa of the Spear: 'Give me your earrings and your natural armour too, and receive my Spear, Karṇa, on this stipulation. When I slay demons, the unfailing Spear flies from my hand and kills 25 enemies in hundreds before returning to my hand again. When it lies in your hand, Sūta's son, it will kill a single mighty enemy, a roaring, blazing hero; then it will return to me.'

'I only want to kill a single enemy in mighty battle,' answered Karṇa, 'a roaring, blazing hero of whom I am afraid.'

Indra said, 'You shall kill a single mighty, roaring enemy in battle; but the one whom you seek is protected by someone very great. Kṛṣṇa is his protector, whom experts in the Veda call Hari, the invincible Boar, the unfathomable Nārāyaṇa.'

30 'Even so,' replied Karṇa, 'let the excellent unfailing Spear be mine for the killing of a single hero, blessed lord, so that I may slay my blazing enemy. And I shall cut off and give you my earrings and my armour; but when they have been cut from my body, may I not appear hideous.'

Indra said, 'Because you shun untruth, Karṇa, you will not appear hideous at all, nor will your body bear any wound; you will regain the appearance and the radiance of your father, O best of all those who speak. But if you thoughtlessly release this weapon without need, when you are not in danger and other weapons lie to hand, it will fall upon yourself.'

'I shall release this Spear of Indra', answered Karṇa, 'when I am in severest danger, as you have instructed me: I tell you this truthfully.'

35 He accepted the blazing Spear, lord of the peoples; then he took a sharp knife and cut the armour from his every limb. When they saw Karṇa cutting himself in this way, gods, men, demons and the hosts of Siddhas all let out a roar, for he showed no sign of pain. Then

heavenly drums thundered, and heavenly flowers rained down from on high, as Karṇa, heroic man, was seen still smiling while cutting his own body with a knife. After cutting the heavenly armour from his body he presented it, still wet with blood, to Indra; and in the same way he cut off and presented his earrings. It is for this deed that he is known as Karṇa the Cutter. And Indra, laughing at the deception that had brought Karṇa glory throughout the world, believed he had achieved his purpose for the Pāṇḍavas; so after this he returned directly to heaven.

When the Kauravas learnt of the robbing of Karṇa, they were all 40 dejected and humiliated; but the Pāṇḍavas in the forest were filled with joy to hear that the Sūta's son had been left in such a state.

Janamejaya spoke:

Where were the Pāṇḍava heroes staying, and from whom did they hear the good news? What did they do when the twelfth year had passed? Blessed sir, make all this known to me.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

After rescuing Draupadī and driving away Jayadratha, and after hearing in full from Mārkanḍeya the ancient tales of gods and seers, the heroic men returned with their priests and their chariots and followers, all their cooks and their chamberlains, from their hermitage in the Kāmyaka forest to holy Dvaitavana, for they had completed their whole, dreadful exile in the forest.

[295] *Yudhiṣṭhīra is approached by a Brahmin whose firesticks have been carried off after becoming tangled in a deer's antlers; he is anxious that his agnihotra ritual will be spoilt. The Pāṇḍavas set out in search of the deer, but in vain.*

Nakula expresses his anger at their plight. [296] Yudhiṣṭhīra ascribes their situation to dharma, but the other three Pāṇḍavas blame themselves for not having killed the Kauravas who insulted and cheated them.

Yudhiṣṭhīra now sends Nakula to look for water. He finds a pool, and is about to drink when a voice from the air warns him not to do so without first