

THE QUEEN OF THE PANDAVAS

Farzana Moon

© 2001 Farzana Moon ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published in the March 2001 issue of SCENE4 (www.scene4.com) and provided as a free PDF download. Permission is granted to print one copy of this version for personal reading purposes.

All Rights Reserved by the Author

The QUEEN OF THE PANDAVAS

Cast of Characters

Five Pandava princes:

Yudhishtira

Bheema

Arjuna

Nakula

Sahadeva

Draupadi : The wife of the five Pandavas

Kunti : The mother of the five Pandavas (Nakula and Sahadeva, her stepsons).

Radheya : Another son of Kunti by god Suriya (Sun) before her marriage to Pandu.

Krishna : Cousin of the Pandavas and the Kauravas

Dhiritarashtra : Blind king of the Kauravas

Gandhari : The wife of Dhiritarashtra

Duryodhana : Their son

Dussasna : Gandhari's stepson

Sakuni : Gandhari's brother

Soldiers

ACT 1

Scene: A large room in the palace at Indraprastha. Two rectangular windows overlooking the garden with a courtyard in the background. By the mantle are displayed all sorts of bows, arrows and quivers. The entire east wall is decorated with swords in jeweled sheaths. In the middle of the room is a low table, furnished with exquisitely carved pieces of chess. The davenport and low stools are opulently covered with silks and damasks. Brightly colored rugs woven in silk and wool are generously scattered at the foot of each furniture, and near the door which is studded with brass nails. The windows are embellished with the garlands of fresh flowers. And the other door across from the east wall is revealing an orchard of the tamarind trees.

When the curtain rises, Arjuna is seen standing by the door. He is shooting arrows from his bow, named Gandiva, into the very heart of the orchard. Bheema is seated by the brick fireplace, polishing his mace with utmost absorption. Nakula and Sahadeva are squatted on the satiny cushions, playing chess.

BHEEMA

(His gaze dreamy)

How fortunate we all are! I have been thinking, Arjuna. All five of us, brothers and husbands. All married to the beautiful Draupadi. What can be more beautiful than our love for each other, and the combined love of us all for our wife and queen, Draupadi? We are fortunate indeed. Our love can even move the mountains, and lift the oceans clear to the skies, at the slightest of our wishes, if not of our commands.

ARJUNA

(Stringing another arrow in his bow)

Yes, Bheema, yes. If it was not for our mother, Kunti Devi, you all would have remained the stinking bachelors.

(Laughing and sweeping his gaze over Nakula and Sahadeva)

ARJUNA (Continued)

And where is Yudhishtira, our eldest brother? The king of Indraprastha!

(Laughs again)

NAKULA

(Without lifting his eyes off the chessboard)

How you forget, Arjuna! Yudhishtira has gone to Hastinapura, to play dice with our cousin, Duryodhana.

ARJUNA

(Unheeding)

Had I told mother that I had brought a wife instead of a gift, she would have never bound me with the injunction to share my wife with all you indolent princes, my brothers just the same! Even before I could say, Draupadi, she had uttered the fateful words to share my gift with you all. Had I been more bold, I would have had Draupadi all to myself. Oh, what heaven, it could have been! Though, she is fit to be the wife of all the gods, and is envy of all the goddess'.

BHEEMA

If you are so sore about sharing your wife with us, then why did you regard our Mother's words as some divine oracle, and consented?

ARJUNA

How could I disobey! It is our dharma to obey our mothers. The words of all mothers are sacred, and they are the laws of this universe. All heavens lay cradled under a Mother's feet.

(Laughing)

ARJUNA (continued)

Don't be such a crooning pundit, Bheema. I am not sore at all.

NAKULA

Sahadeva, doesn't he look like a pundit? Our brother, Bheema, I mean.

SAHADEVA

Yes, Nakula. And if you don't pay attention, your king is going to be dead.

BHEEMA

(Laughing)

Not sore! How can I forget your face, when mother told you that you have to share your bhiksha with us all. Why did you say you had brought bhiksha for her? Bhiksha meaning gift, any gift? How could she tell, you meant a wife, not a gift? Or any worthless gift, which she didn't care if you shared with us or not.

ARJUNA

(Heedless as before)

And imagine, the flowers rained on me, when I won the hand of Draupadi. I was the only prince who could pierce the heart of the revolving fish with five unerring arrows. The rest of the suitors had returned to their homes in great misery and dejection. Their hearts bloated with the sense of shame and failure.

SAHADEVA

(Leaping to his feet)

Check!

NAKULA

(Pressing his head in both hands)

I am doomed.

SAHADEVA

(His eyes flashing accusations at both Bheema and Arjuna)

Are you two not ashamed to talk about our wife in such a manner, and in her absence too? Our queen will rain fire on your heads, if she knew.

BHEEMA

Arjuna, is Draupadi really the daughter of Fire?

ARJUNA

Much in the same fashion, Bheema, as all of us are the sons of the gods.

SAHADEVA

But Arjuna, do you believe that god Indra is your father?

ARJUNA

By the law and virtue of our dharma, yes. Don't we all believe that our brother, Yudhishtira is the son of god Dharma?

NAKULA

(Rising to his feet suddenly, and sailing toward the east wall)

Come, Sahadeva. Why doubt that we are the sons of gods? We belong to the Khyastr caste, and to fight is our duty and dharma both. We are born to fight, lest evil prevails over good. And right now, there is much evil in the world. Come, let us practice fencing, and be merry for a while, before evil calls us to our duty.

SAHADEVA

(Laughs, then joins Nakula, and selects a sword for himself)
Our cousin, Duryodhana, is immersed knee-deep in evil. Are we going to fight with him too, Nakula?

[Both Nakula and Sahadeva start practicing their fencing. They are laughing and teasing each other, while Bheema turns his attention to his mace, and Arjuna to his Gandiva]

[Draupadi floats into the room adjoining the great hallway. She is arrayed in colorful silks with a coronet of diamonds on her head]

DRAUPADI

Put your Gandiva away, sweet Arjuna, there are no wars to be fought in the near future.

ARJUNA

The wars in your eyes, my Draupadi, make me hug my Gandiva more closer than ever.

DRAUPADI

(Raising her arms up imperiously, and exclaiming)
All the wars fought and the wars to come, abide in the eyes of your mother alone, sweet Arjuna.

(Her eyes flashing, all of a sudden)

DRAUPADI (Continued)

Ah, five godlike husbands! And not even one to heed the pleas of their queen, for love and harmony in this royal household.

[Arjuna laughs with good humor, his mirth uncontrollable]

BHEEMA

You are the luckiest of queens on this earth, my lovely queen! Married to five divine husbands? We are your five senses, pouring sweetness into your divine lips, breathing sacred fire into your very eyes. And dancing like the puppets in your sweet mind, and bathing your soul in the purity light, where we feel lost everlastingly.

NAKULA

(To Sahadeva)

That's not how Bheema's thoughts were pouring forth a few moments ago. He is keeping too much company with the poets and the seers.

SAHADEVA

Yes, he said were the most fortunate of all the husbands, didn't he?

DRAUPADI

(Turning to Bheema)

How you nurse that mace of yours, Bheema. Put that away, or the fire in my eyes will surely turn into a hurricane, tossing away the weapons of wars to the winds. You are always polishing that mace, while the rust and the squalor gather in your kingly brain. Don't look at me like that, Bheema, as if you are so...very much devoted to me. Your eyes make me...well, I swoon and shudder all inside. Well, I am in a mood of excursion, not poetry and entertainment.

BHEEMA

I will lay my eyes at your feet, my queen, and they will kiss and tickle your sweet toes, before the hurricane in your eyes banishes me from the heavens under your feet.

DRAUPADI

(Laughing and turning impatiently toward her two younger husbands)

Sweet Nakula and Sahadeva, this is the palace of pleasure and entertainment, not a den of brawl and raillery! Go out in the garden, and spill your prowess' on the grass. It might turn green despite the drought and this searing heat.

[Nakula and Sahadeva burst out laughing, their swords poised in an act of fencing. Arjuna stands there thoughtful. Bheema is watching Draupadi, his gaze warm and tender]

NAKULA

We are honing our skills to fight, my queen. And our thoughts are turning toward our evil cousin. We are going to kill Duryodhana for sure, if he persists in practicing his evil designs over us.

DRAUPADI

(Laughing)

Ah, that envious, avaricious viper! Remember, when he came to our palace? Inside our great hall! mistaking water for marble, and getting drenched. So befuddled was he, and so green with envy, that he had collided against a wall, thinking that it was a door.

[All are smitten with uncontrollable mirth. Arjuna flings himself on the davenport, cradling his head under his arms. Bheema, amidst his own volley of mirth, jumps to his feet, then sinks down on the davenport beside Arjuna. Nakula and Sahadeva just stand there, plunged in their own fits of laughter.]

DRAUPADI

And where is my lord of Dharma? The king of Indraprastha! My sweet Yudhishtira?

SAHADEVA

(Choking with mirth and gasping for breath)

Evil Duryodhana...he has gone to play dice with our evil cousin.

DRAUPADI

(Begins to pace, her mirth truncated)

Evil! I can smell evil in this very room. Yudhishtira's love for dice is going to lead us all to doom and death. Yes, I do feel the breath of evil and doom, inside the very hearths in this whole palace. How can Yudhishtira, my lord and my king? Consent to play dice with that evil man? That man, corrupted by greed, deceit and treachery! Has my lord already not lost enough stakes? Our wealth diminishing, and being squandered by this vice of playing dice. And that too, by my own lord and king?

[Arjuna springs to a sitting position, as if startled out of his mirthful reverie. Bheema props a few pillows behind Arjuna's back, and he himself sits couchant against one round pillow. Nakula and Sahadeva resume their game of fencing.]

ARJUNA

Our kingly brother is righteous, my lovely Draupadi. No vice dwells in his kind and loving heart. It is our dharma to accept the invitation of any man, even if it comes from an enemy. Since Duryodhana sent his uncle Sakuni with an invitation to play dice, Yudhishtira could not decline.

DRAUPADI

Sakuni, the vessel of corruption! The master of wickedness! And last time, the invitation was from Dussasna, the evil mate of his evil brother, Duryodhana. They are all evil, and their blind father and king, Dhritarashtra. The blind king, your dear, dear uncle, sweet Arjuna! Sightless to the malefic lies and intrigues of his adored sons.

NAKULA

(His sword locked with Sahadeva's)

King Dhritarashtra, my queen, though old and blind, has nothing to do with the vices of his sons.

SAHADEVA

(Wrenching free his sword, his hands poised for another maneuver)

Besides, my queen. King Dhritarashtra gave us shelter in his own palace, when our father Pandu died.

DRAUPADI

(Still pacing, still thinking aloud)

Yes, the kingly Pandu, the only king alive or dead, fit to rule this earth! The whole clan of the Kauravas; especially, the blind king, are cruel and devious. Plotting and scheming in their own mute and sightless world. Giving you shelter, you say? My sweet, innocent husbands! were you not the rightful heirs of Hastinapura. And now, the blind king has made Duryodhana, his own wicked son, the lord of this earth. How shamelessly, he sent you all to the remote city of Varanauata, burning your house of Lac, and plotting to kill you all. And when he didn't succeed in killing you, he granted you a generous boon? This kingdom of Indraprastha, the barren and incult land of the exiles! If it were not for the hard work and perseverance of all you brothers, we would have lived in thatched huts, with poisonous roots as our only means for subsistence. A barren strip of land made fruitful by the godlike Pandava, as all know and profess.

[Bheema eases himself up slowly, and returns to his mace by the fireplace. Arjuna sits there mute. A thin smile curls upon his lips, and his eyes gather warmth and amusement. Nakula and Sahadeva keep fencing, their bantering remarks bouncing back and forth in rapport with their flashing swords.]

BHEEMA

Bhagwan resides with the ones who practice dharma, and are righteous. He has made us happy and prosperous. So, why should we look back to our past, where even the misfortunes of all those years are swallowed up by the ocean of darkness.

DRAUPADI

(Heedlessly)

And you, sweet Bheema! Didn't you tell me, that when you were just a small boy, Sakuni and Duryodhana fed you poison? They bound you up, and tossed you into the waters of the Ganga. And then you were attacked by the deadly snakes underwater. Those snakes spitting poison, and coiling around your body?

BHEEMA

Even then Bhagwan was with me, my dear Draupadi. The prayers of Yudhishtira had reached me in the very deeps of the holy Ganga. My brother's dharma saved me even then. The poison from the snakes became an antidote for my own poison. And I was able to kill all the snakes. They were sent to the nether world of Vasuki. The Naga King of the nether world, Vasuki, was so pleased with my courage, that he sent me the divine elixir as a boon. I drank eight full cups of Amrita, which poured great strength into my body. An army of thousand elephants can't match my strength, if they dared fight with me. I can kill the Kaurava princes with my bare hands, if they dared challenge my prowess in war.

ARJUNA

Each one of your five husbands are both gods and mortals, my Draupadi. But Yudhishtira being the eldest one is like a god to us, commanding the love and devotion of all our brothers. His dharma alone saves us all from evil and doom in this world.

DRAUPADI

(Her feet coming to an abrupt halt. She stands in the middle of the room, the look in her eyes dark and smoldering)
Yudhishtira is my lord and my king too, sweet Arjuna, and my god! But his dharma, I do not understand. How can he forgive and condone the evil in Sakuni, Dussasna, Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra. All those wicked, wicked Kauravas, guided by the blind king. And Duryodhana, the most wicked of them all. Didn't he make you fight a duel with...oh, what's his name? Yes, Radheya, a sutaputra, born in a lowly family of...Oh, how my heart churns and suffers, when I think of

that woeful day. How Duryodhana bestowed on Radheya the kingdom of Anga right on the spot, so he could be fit to fight with the Pandava princes. With you, sweet Arjuna!

(She drifts toward the davenport as if in a dream, and seats herself beside Arjuna)

DRAUPADI (Continued)

And Radheya! much favored by Kunti devi too. How she fawns on him! Making him sit at her feet. That sutaputra! That base, low born, braggart of a wretch.

[Sahadeva, anticipating defeat, flings his sword to the floor. Then troops straight toward the davenport. He sprawls himself at the feet of Draupadi, exhausted and panting. Nakula replaces the swords back on the wall, laughing to himself. Flashing a teasing look at Sahadeva, and then joining Bheema by the hearth)

SAHADEVA

My dear Draupadi, that wretch of a braggart is no mean archer, though. Didn't you hear him say: Fame is the woman I have chosen as my bride. That sutaputra, as we all say?

ARJUNA

He is no sutaputra. Haven't you heard everyone say, he is the son of Suriya, the Sun god himself.

BHEEMA

(As if oblivious to Nakula's presence beside him, murmurs to himself)

The son of Suriya! Just because, he is born with kachava on his wrist, and kundalas in his ears.

ARJUNA

(Reminiscently)

Radheya is a great archer, I do admit. And his feet, they remind me of...

DRAUPADI

(Her eyes flashing)

Of Kunti Devi! You have told me so often, sweet Arjuna. To utter, even such a thought, is sacrilege indeed. Kunti devi's sacred feet have no resemblance with Radheya's. And to think, my lord Yudhishtira is sitting there with all the deceitful men as his companions. The base, low born Radheya, and evil Sakuni! The cruel Dussasna, and wicked Duryodhana! And playing dice, and the blind, conceited king watching my lord with hatred and gloating. My king, my Yudhishtira will lose all, the gold, the jewels, the kingdom! Oh, I can't think, my heart is breaking.

ARJUNA

(Slipping his arm around Draupadi's waist)

Dharma will sit with Yudhishtira, my queen. Don't you grieve needlessly, Draupadi. Kunti devi is there to ward off all evils. And queen Gandhari, Duryodhana's own mother! She condones not the faults of her own sons, as king Dhritarashtra does. She will be watching over all, not permitting the stakes to run very high.

SAHADEVA

(Bouncing up to a sitting position)

To allay your fears, my queen, we will go to Hastinapura. We will all go, and see how the game of dice is faring.

NAKULA

Yes, and we will fetch our lord Yudhishtira back to our palace.

BHEEMA

And I will kill Sakuni, if he is cheating our brother of gold and jewels.

DRAUPADI

(Getting to her feet, as if in a daze)

No! I don't want my husbands to go to that palace of doom. Stay with me, my husbands, stay. Don't leave me, don't leave me alone here at Indraprastha. I

am afraid, this sudden presage! Fear and doom are churning inside my very heart.

(Begins to pace)

DRAUPADI (Continued)

My heart is thundering. Something inside me is kindling to fire? No! don't come near me. You all might get scorched.

ARJUNA

(Poetically)

You are the flame of Love and Beauty, my Draupadi. And all us five brothers are the moths, fluttering around you to touch and absorb the fire of your sweetness. We all know your fears and moods. And the only reason we don't get scorched by your flaming moods is, that we are the sons of the gods. But dear Draupadi, what is this sudden, strange fear? This abrupt fear of yours must be more savage and overwhelming than ever before, for you are flushed...and look feverish. What do you fear, dear heart?

DRAUPADI

(Dreamily)

I fear the Kaurava princes. They are your enemies, and lord Yudhishtira's everlasting foes.

ARJUNA

(Getting to his feet slowly and thoughtfully)

Yudhishtira has no enemies, my lovely Draupadi. The only enemies, which he thought he had, were banished by the boon from his father DHARMA. Lust, envy, anger, avarice, arrogance, possessiveness, all are gone from him. They were his six enemies--the enemies of all men! When he had communed with his father, he had requested that all those six enemies of men be washed away from his body, soul and spirit. And he was granted this boon, his mind, heart and soul purged clean of all mortal corruptions. Now he fears no enemy, for righteousness are his shield and armor.

DRAUPADI

(Murmuring to herself)

Dharma! Righteousness! Are they going to save us from the oceans of grief and ignominy? My king, my husband, a dice addict! Oh, I can see the gates of death, opening wide, wider yet! And the greed of the Kaurava princes, pulling us toward darkness...oh, what do I see?

SAHADEVA

(Lumbering to his feet, and accosting Arjuna)

Yudhishtira is not your only husband, dear Draupadi. We are all here to share your fears, along with your joys and dreams. Together, we are a bundle of strength, and we can defeat all foes on earth, if they dare challenge us. And yet, the dharma of Yudhishtira alone keeps us all alive, or we would crumble to dust like the dry, brittle sticks.

DRAUPADI

(Still pacing. Her eyes wild and flashing)

And the dharma of Yudhishtira is the dharma of all you brothers. And the dharma of your mother is your dharma, too! And that is the dharma of all my husbands? Had Kunti devi not spoken the words: All of you share whatever bhiksha you have brought, I would have remained the bride of Arjuna alone. Your mother's words were not written as some divine edict from the lips of dharma, you know. They could have been undone. She didn't know that by bhiksha, you meant a living, breathing bride, not some casket brimming with precious jewels!

BHEEMA

(Getting to his feet, and murmuring sadly)

To us, our mother means more than all the dharmastras put together. She has never spoken a lie. Her words are sacred, and they can never be undone.

DRAUPADI

(Unheeding)

I wish, Krishna was there when she had spoken those words. He would have interceded.

NAKULA

(Sadly and thoughtfully)

Our cousin Krishna, my Draupadi, could have never even thought of interceding. He reveres Kunti devi, and washes her feet whenever he visits her. Always holding her words sacred, than his own wisdom and discretion.

DRAUPADI

(Absently)

I have washed Krishna's feet myself. With oils and perfumes.

ARJUNA

(In an abrupt fit of jealousy)

Krishna, my queen, is no god. Not a god, that you should wash his feet!

DRAUPADI

(Her feet coming to a slow halt before the armaments on the wall.

She stands there under some spell of daze and oblivion)

Krishna, your cousin, and you don't even know his divine attributes. He is the avatar of all the gods. Have you not seen his divine form...terrible and awesome? He is the lord of all the dharmas in this world, and of the worlds nether and beyond.

ARJUNA

And have you seen his divine form, my queen. He is to visit Hastinapura soon, and we must all go and see him. Maybe, he will reveal his divine form to us brothers too!

DRAUPADI

(Exclaiming suddenly)

To Hastinapura! To that palace of doom! Why not to Indraprastha? He has no great love for the Kauravas.

ARJUNA

Because, Kauravas have sent him an invitation, dear Draupadi.

DRAUPADI

(Lamenting)

And why didn't the Pandavas? Oh, if fate had not chosen five husbands for me, I would have taken spinsterhood as my only bridegroom.

NAKULA

(His tones giddy and passionate)

A woman, by nature, is happy to have more than one husband, my queen. I have acquired this knowledge from the lips of the sages themselves.

(He approaches her reluctantly. Then hugs her bashfully)

NAKULA (Continued)

Are you unhappy, my queen? Wedded to us brothers as your doting husbands?

DRAUPADI

(Caressing Nakula's cheek)

No, my sweet Nakula, I am not unhappy. I just wish, that you all learn to talk less about dharma, and more about love.

BHEEMA

The daughter of the sage Jatila had seven rishis as her husbands. And she had stayed happy till the end of her life.

DRAUPADI

(Her eyes wild and shining)

And all you brothers are not the wise rishis, but mortal men, claiming to be gods.

NAKULA

Give us a chance to cheer you, my queen. What gloom has conquered your wit and beauty? Sahadeva, go, fetch the veena, sitar and the tambourines. We will make music and be merry.

DRAUPADI

(Sails toward the window imperiously, and stands there with her back toward her husbands)

No song or music are going to cheer my heart, this warm afternoon, my sweet husbands. Not until Yudhishtira comes back. My heart is heavy with fear and presage. Yudhishtira's love for the game of dice, his only weakness, is going to be the blight of our fortunes, I can see that. I can sense this feeling of doom, today, this very hour. Yes, Yudhishtira is going to lose all, our wealth, his kingdom, he is going to lose all!

ARJUNA

We will win back all the wealths and the kingdoms with our godlike strengths, my queen. Worldly possessions are but the worthless pebbles scattered on the tapestry of Love inside our loving hearts.

DRAUPADI

Love! Now, I hear the voice of Reason from your lips, sweet Arjuna.

(She turns, and seeks the comfort of the davenport)

DRAUPADI (Continued)

My fear is gone, I think. Come, sit by me, husbands all. What means can you devise this hot, cheerless afternoon to cheer your queen?

[Arjuna claims his seat beside Draupadi. Bheema lowers himself on the rug at the foot of the davenport. Nakula fetches his veena, and Sahadeva his flute]

ARJUNA

The fire of emeralds in your eyes, my queen, can only be quenched, if I sing the praises of Krishna to you. And that is how I will entertain my queen and my Draupadi, hoping to win and cheer her heart. Though, you have unjustly accused me of not knowing my cousin. Alas, I know him too well. And the stories about his divine form, strange and awesome, are trembling on my lips. I can't relate them all, even if I tried, but I will attempt to recite a few.

NAKULA

And I will make my veena sing the praises of Krishna, while you tell these divine stories, Arjuna.

SAHADEVA

And I will make my flute carry these stories back to the heart of Krishna, so that his thoughts turn to visiting us, than the Kaurava princes.

ARJUNA

Why have you become so quiet, Bheema? Cast away your indolence, and fetch your sitar.

BHEEMA

You already know, Arjuna, I am a great devotee of Krishna. And no hurricane can move me from this spot, while you tell the stories about our dear, dear cousin.

[Nakula touches the strings of his veena. Sahadeva evokes lovely tunes on his flute. Draupadi looks tenderly at Bheema.]

DRAUPADI

Yes, sweet Bheema, you are so very quiet, all of a sudden. Have I offended you, while rambling about my fears?

BHEEMA

(Laughing)

No, my queen. The fire of rubies on your lips have scorched my tongue.

[All laugh]

DRAUPADI

Your flatteries, sweet Bheema, will turn me to an ugly witch, one of these days!

(Looks at Arjuna)

DRAUPADI (Continued)

I am waiting, Arjuna. You better touch the hem of those stories, before I float up the palace roofs to the very heavens.

ARJUNA

(Looks into Draupadi's eyes. Suddenly, his own look is dazed and spellbound)
 The stories, what stories? What do I see, now and forever? A child born dead. His mother is weeping. Krishna is holding the child to his own breast. His fingers are sliding over the child from the head to his little toes. The child is alive! Yes, he is crying lustily. He is alive, he is alive...

DRAUPADI

Whose child, Arjuna? What are you saying?

ARJUNA

(Startled out of his daze)

Ours, Draupadi. Our own grandson. The son of our beloved Abhimanyu. I was looking into the eyes of the Future. The fire in your eyes is making me...

DRAUPADI

(Urgently)

What else do you see, Arjuna? Tell me?

[Bheema looks frightened, covering his face with his hands. Nakula and Sahadeva abandon their instruments, and flock around Arjuna. The look in their eyes wild and shining]

ARJUNA

The city of Dwaraka. Sinking, sinking. Krishna's beautiful palace! All the buildings, everything, sinking deeper and deeper, under this flood of water. Everything buried under this deluge...living! No, it cannot...covered by the sea? Placid as a lake..

DRAUPADI

Arjuna, no more, no more!

ARJUNA

(Now startled to his feet)

I must see Krishna. Where is Krishna, I must see him?

BHEEMA

(Uncovering his face)

You must have been in a trance, Arjuna. You don't know what you are saying.

ARJUNA

(Wildly)

What did I say?

SAHADEVA

The resurrection of a child? The city of Dwaraka, gone under the sea!

NAKULA

You were talking about your own son, Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu is a young boy. Not even married yet! How can his child be resurrected?

DRAUPADI

(Lamenting aloud)

Abhimanyu! Where are my sons? I didn't see them today. The palace halls are empty. Where have they all gone?

(She flies to the window, and stands there looking out)

BHEEMA

Hunting, dear Draupadi. They have all gone hunting. And with your permission too. Don't you remember? Early in the morning, you granted them permission with your own holy lips.

ARJUNA

Gone hunting? All my sons...

[Dussasna storms into the room, grinning and strutting. His eyes are blazing with the light of pride and gloating. Arjuna confronts him with a mingling of rage and disbelief]

ARJUNA

(Thundering)

Dussasna! How dare you walk into the chamber of our queen like a bold thief? Stay, where you are, Dussasna. One more step, and my bare hands will crush your very bones to smithereens.

DUSSASNA

(Laughing)

Empty boasts, Arjuna, empty boasts. Ah, the Pandava princes. You are not princes anymore, but slaves. All of you, slaves! Slaves, to my lord Duryodhana. Yudhishtira has lost everything. You were the last ones of his heavy stakes. He has lost all! His wealth, his kingdom, his brothers, even his...

[A shrill cry escapes through the lips of all brothers]

Lost!

[All the Pandava princes rush toward the door, and are gone. Draupadi whirls around, her eyes flashing fire in some ocean of rage and hatred]

DUSSASNA

(Smitten with awe by her beauty, and by the kindling of rage in her eyes)

Yes, Yudhishtira has even lost his beautiful queen. He has lost all! His wealth, his kingdom, his sons, his brothers...his queen.

DRAUPADI

(Choking with anger and hatred)

Ashes in your mouth, you foul liar!

(Looks around wildly)

DRAUPADI (Continued)

Oh, where have my husbands gone?

DUSSASNA

(Grinning once again)

They are riding toward Hastinapura right this moment, probably. Thinking to themselves, that they will win back the losses of their brother. But they are approaching closer to their own shame and slavery. As soon as they reach Hastinapura, they will be captured like the slaves, and bound in heavy chains by the will of my lord Duryodhana.

DRAUPADI

The most avaricious of all men on the face of this earth, is your lord Duryodhana, we all know! But how can my lord Yudhishtira lose all? No one, not even the hateful tongues of the most wicked would make me believe in such lies?

DUSSASNA

(Smiling to himself)

Your lord Yudhishtira! That inveterate gambler and lover of dice. Has he not lost his fortunes, many, many times before?

DRAUPADI

You disgust me, Dussasna. Get out of my sight, or my eyes will rain burning coals on your very face. When my lord Yudhishtira gets back, don't come crawling to lick his feet for forgiveness.

DUSSASNA

(With one snort of a laughter)

Your lord now is the slave of my master, Duryodhana. He cannot gain his freedom. If my lord Duryodhana relents, he might grant you exile. Or, you all will be working like slaves in his palace.

DRAUPADI

How dare you? You evil viper! My hatred alone has the power to kill all the Kaurava princes, who have dared wound my heart. Begone! Out of my sight!

DUSSASNA

(Laughing derisively)

Come, Draupadi. You are a slave too. My lord Duryodhana has summoned you to his palace, so that you can serve as a maid to his wives.

DRAUPADI

(Appalled and lamenting)

Oh, heavens! What insults!

DUSSASNA

(Gliding closer toward her)

Come, Draupadi. You have been summoned by my lord Duryodhana, and you cannot disobey him.

(Grabs her hand into his strong grip)

DRAUPADI

(Struggling)

The woman you have insulted today, her name is not Draupadi, but Death. And she shall have her revenge! Yes, she will be avenged, even if she has to squeeze valor out of the heart of each man, who has taken cowardice as his bride.

DUSSASNA

And I am no coward.

(Snatches the crown from her head, and tosses it to the floor. Then drags her by the hair toward the door)

THE CURTAIN

ACT 2

Scene: The palace at Hastinapura. A large room, furnished opulently with silk hangings and gold tassels. Against the fireplace is a large throne embellished with jewels, and a colorful canopy overhead. Dhritarashtra is seated on the throne, cross-legged. Beside him are seated, Duryodhana to his right, and Dussasna to his left. At the foot of the throne is seated Radheya, sad and contemplative. Further to the left, by the lacework window, is a sumptuous davenport, where Kunti and Gandhari are lolling against the satiny pillows. Sakuni is perched on a large pillow below the davenport, his look evil and brooding. Across from the throne, Draupadi is standing alone and forlorn. Her hair is streaming down her shoulders in a wild disarray, and her gaze is bright and restless. A few paces away from the door, are seen the Pandava princes seated in a semicircle, no rich pillows to support their backs. When the curtain rises, Draupadi is wringing her hands under some spell of despair and hopelessness. She flashes a delirious look at Dussasna, as if oblivious to the presence of anyone else in this room.

DRAUPADI

I stand here defiled by the hands of this lecherous worm, while my godlike husbands sit mute. Defending not the honor of their sacred bride.

YUDHISHTHIRA

You are dearer to us than our lives, Draupadi. Yet dharma has sealed our lips.

DRAUPADI

(Flinging her arms up in one hopeless, helpless gesture)

Oh, my great lord Yudhishtira has spoken at last. The righteous one! Losing all in dice, and talking of dharma? To protect one's wife from injury or insult, isn't that the highest of dharmas for all husbands?

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Remorsefully)

A wise man becomes a fool, my dear queen, when he lays his hands on dice. And yet, fate is more powerful than all the wisdom of man.

GANDHARI

(Interceding)

Cease your lamenting, Draupadi, and do not torment your husbands thus. A worse fate than this is in store for my own Kaurava princes. I can see! for I am cursed with the sight to foresee. Twelve years of exile in a lovely forest will be but one season drifting in a dream, for you all. Then you will return to Indraprastha, blessed with more glories which you have not ever seen before.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Raising his hand, impatiently and imperiously)

Thirteen years, dear Gandhari, thirteen. Thirteen years, my sibyl queen, thirteen.

KUNTI

(Lamenting to herself)

Thirteen long years. My sons, homeless and wandering. In exile, my sons, my sons.

(Her burning eyes reach out and caress her sons, as if stricken with grief and sorrow)

DURYODHANA

(Smiling amiably)

Do not grieve, Kunti devi. Only twelve years in the forest. The thirteenth year, they are free to roam anywhere, as long as they disguise themselves and remain anonymous. They can even venture as far as Indraprastha, if they contrive means not to be detected.

DRAUPADI

Your greed has conquered all, Duryodhana, all. Yes, your greed alone! where shame itself sits weeping in tears of blood. You are ruling over a nest of vipers, Duryodhana, and nourishing their greeds with the venom of your own greed. In the end, they will attack you like the vultures, and you will fall prey to your own wicked designs. Yes, vipers all. And this Radheya, this sutaputra, whom you favor...

(Gasping for breath)

RADHEYA

(Laughing)

A sutaputra, yes. And you are a pretty slave with the tongue of fire.

[Bheema, in an act of rising, is pushed down roughly by Yudhishtira]

DRAUPADI

(Heedlessly, turns her flashing eyes on Sakuni)

And that Sakuni, your uncle, Duryodhana. He is the king of all vipers. His evil eye is fixed on fate to invoke death and devastation.

SAKUNI

(Calmly)

Your husband himself has invited fate as his downfall, Draupadi.

DRAUPADI

(Rage and hatred kindling in her eyes with a stinging assault)

And that Dussasna, the master of evil and deceit. The most hateful of all vipers.

SAKUNI

Don't blame the Kaurava princes, Draupadi. Dussasna obeyed but the orders of his brother, the lord Duryodhana.

DRAUPADI

(Murder shining in her eyes, as she returns her gaze to her husbands)

Oh, heavens! Such arrows of cruelty! I am falling...am fallen. Ah! one husband of mine, a dice addict, has transformed the other four into cowards?

ARJUNA

Dear Draupadi, think! Yudhishtira was a king till yesterday. And now he is the slave of the Kaurava princes...we all are. Had Yudhishtira not bound us

with the oaths of silence and obedience, no Kaurava princes would have been alive today. The dharma of Yudhishtira is our dharma, as you know. We are wearing this dharma as our only defense, and we...

DRAUPADI

(Interrupting with a rueful exclamation)

Dharma! Dharma! I shall go mad, indeed. Yudhishtira, didn't you tell my father after our wedding: that your daughter will be leaving a lake of lotus' only to enter another? And now, I am standing on the pyre of thorns. Wounded and bleeding! and no husband here to tend my bruised heart.

GANDHARI

(To Duryodhana)

My son, relent. Have pity on the grieving queen, Duryodhana, have pity. Forget about the wagers. Forget about the debts and the wagers of the Pandava princes, and release them from the bondage of this exile.

[Duryodhana only smiles placidly]

KUNTI

(Pleading with Radheya)

My child, you are like a son to me. Plead with Duryodhana. He listens to you, Radheya, he does. Ask him to be kind to my sons, and he will relent.

[Radheya sits there speechless, his eyes gathering pain and sadness]

YUDHISHTHIRA

My queen, if you only knew. Grief and remorse are churning in my heart to make a salve for your wounds, dear Draupadi. But the river of hatred in your eyes! it alone drowns me in shame. While you stand on a pyre of thorns, I am sitting on a bed of arrows. Yet they pierce not my body, as the arrows shot from your eyes do.

DRAUPADI

And yet, the arrow from my eyes have not pierced your dharma. What is your dharma, my lord? For this last time, tell me, Yudhishtira, tell me?

YUDHISHTHIRA

The sense of righteousness, my queen, is dharma. To face evil in the very heart of sin, and to return to the path of righteousness--is dharma. Through my own follies, I have sinned, and I will suffer for my sinful follies. Carrying them on my shoulders, year after year, till each one is sloughed off by the burden of my sufferings. And then I will return to Indraprastha, Whole and purged.

SAKUNI

(Murmuring to himself)

After wallowing in sin, how can one approach righteousness! With corruption still soiling one's body and soul?

DRAUPADI

(Laughing hysterically)

I am going to burn my dharma, and throw the ashes over the boundaries of heaven and earth, just to see if the heaven claims it as an orphan of righteousness.

RADHEYA

(Murmuring profoundly)

One has to pass through hell to taste the joys of heaven. Otherwise, how can one know one is in heaven.

DRAUPADI

(Caught under the spell of mirth and delirium)

And you will carry us all, Yudhishtira! All us sinless ones, on you shoulders too? And we will be fed to the beasts of the jungle. Yes, my king and my husband, you will make the forest of Dwaltavana your own bed of sorrows.

BHEEMA

(Imploring)

Compose yourself, my queen. Don't surrender your good sense to grief, have patience. Grace and dignity are your virtues. Abandon this mirth and delirium.

Bind your hair. Take heart, dear Draupadi. Let us beg our leave gracefully, and retire to our solitary abode of peace. Our peaceful exile.

DRAUPADI

I will let you bind my hair, sweet Bheema. Yes, you will bind my hair, when your hands are red with the blood of Dussasna. I will wear his blood like sandoor in my hair.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Making a peaceful gesture with his arms)

Oh, sightless misfortunes. An old and blind king to suffer thus! Cease your laments, Draupadi. Your husband, Yudhishtira, has lost all in the games of dice, and you can't deny that fact. And my son, Duryodhana had kindly granted you exile in the forest. Go in peace, and pray for better days.

DRAUPADI

(An anguished cry escaping her lips)

O Bhagwan, fate has taken hostage all my prayers. I stand here only to curse and lament. O, old, blind king! The eyes of greed have blinded your sight, not your sightless misfortunes. Our misfortunes, indeed. Wild and wide-eyed, our misfortunes will haunt you in your dreams, where you will be able to see the ocean of your own sins and greeds. You will see, and you will shudder.

(Begins to pace absently)

DURYODHANA

(Gazing into the sightless eyes of his father)

This is the reward of our mercy. What strange gratitude?

ARJUNA

(Flashing a scathing look at Duryodhana)

The debt of gratitude is most difficult to pay, when the claimant of that debt turns out to be one's enemy.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Chiding Arjuna)

Keep your silence, Arjuna, as sworn. The dust of arrogance blinds one, yet the dust of humility renders sight.

SAKUNI

(With mirth and derision)

Arjuna needs no sight to cross that narrow path, toward the forest of Dwaltavana.

YUDHISHTHIRA

No passage of life is narrow for the wise, for they see vast oceans expanding before their sight, even where the paths seem tortuous and confined. Yes, the wise have the power to dissolve all difficulties, no matter how tragic or heart-rending, into the pools of obscurity.

RADHEYA

Small oceans, indeed! For mortal sight would render no view against the walls of those trees.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Greatness of ocean is not how vast it is, but how it feeds the small rivers with its constant source of compassion.

SAHADEVA

Please, Yudhishtira, let us not be mystics in our sorrow. We should beg our leave, and start living the life of the mendicants.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Murmuring)

I am waiting.

SAHADEVA

(Exclaiming)

Waiting!

NAKULA

Pandava brothers will live like princes, even in the forest narrow and unyielding.

BHEEMA

Isn't your heart wounded, Yudhishtira? Look at our queen. How she paces forlorn and distraught? A mist of tears are gathering in her eyes.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Bheema! Have you seen a rainbow kindled by tears in one's eyes before? No, Bheema, all the shafts of lightning can't wound me, but the tears of my queen.

SAHADEVA

She is beautiful, even in her grief.

NAKULA

I can see lightning in her eyes.

YUDHISHTHIRA

The person who looks at lightning and thinks how beautiful it is! Usually, forgets the thunder which is sure to follow in its wake.

DRAUPADI

I have heard all, husbands, yes, I have. Yes, my husbands doomed and ill-fated. Like lightning, your words make my world darker than before.

GANDHARI

(To Duryodhana)

Consider all the kings, my son. The great ones! who were peaceloving. Give Indraprastha back to your cousins.

DURYODHANA

I myself am peaceloving, Mother! I have not waged any war...not as yet. Though I sit here, and endure insults upon insults from the lips of beautiful Draupadi.

KUNTI

(Holding the shears of a reprimand in her very eyes)

How you make yourself look like a victim, Duryodhana! Though, you remain the victor of deceit and treachery.

SAKUNI

(Protesting)

Queen Gandhari's son, Kunti devi, knows no deceit. He is the emblem of truth and honesty.

YUDHISHTHIRA

How your deceitful tongue blasphemes the very name of Truth, Sakuni! Duryodhana is blind to Truth, even if he saw it face-to-face as a great challenge to his great wickedness. Truth is the greatest of wealths in this world. And I have nurtured Truth from its infancy to adulthood. And this Truth alone has humbled me in my state of sorrow and humiliation. Yet, this same Truth will serve me as my guide for thirteen years, in my penance and wandering. Then I will return to this land of the wicked, to exile evil from the very face of this earth.

SAKUNI

(Laughing)

In slavery, you will end the rest of your days.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Spite never brings happiness. And wise man shuns it, to get closer to the Truth.

RADHEYA

The fire in Draupadi's eyes is going to kill you, Yudhishtira, if you do not grovel at her feet in the presence of us all.

DRAUPADI

(Her eyes flashing daggers at Radheya)

My fire kills only those who insult me.

DUSSASNA

(Laughing)

Then cease your pacing, Draupadi, like the nemesis of the Kauravas. Kill us with the fire in your eyes.

DRAUPADI

The land, which the Kaurava princes have ploughed with deceit, will be soaked with their own blood. I will wait, till the nemesis itself makes you suffer the most horrible of agonies. Then, I will roast you all on the pyre of my vengeance. My curses will rise like a forest fire, and burn you all to ashes. Sinners you are, and sinners you will remain to the end of your dying days.

GANDHARI

(Her look glazed and vacant)

I see great ruin. Great ruin and devastation all.

ARJUNA

And if you are not consumed by the vengeance of our queen, your tortured souls will beg mercy from the Fire, called the Pandavas.

KUNTI

To court misfortune is the occupation of the fools, king Dhritarashtra, and you have excelled in this to tempt the fates. You have courted Misfortune by loving your sons too much. By condoning their faults and weakness'. By breeding corruption in their hearts for their own cousins. The fault is all yours, king Dhritarashtra, yours alone. The blame rests on you for all the evils in the wake of this hour, and for all the tragedies to follow.

[Dhritarashtra's lips remain sealed, his expression taut and forbidding]

DURYODHANA

The Pandavas, your dear, dear sons, Kunti devi, were born to court infamy. Shunning the light of glory, as if it were plague.

DRAUPADI

Oh, a world, where truth is throttled by the hands of untruth, and justice by the tongues of injustice!

GANDHARI

(Her eyes flashing at both Dussasna and Duryodhana)

Tonight, my son, you will sleep on a bed of thorns, if you insist on sending the Pandava princes to exile. That is! if your conscience has not abandoned you yet.

DHIRITARASHTRA

To change the course of destiny is like emptying the rivers of time into a handful of dewdrops, my queen. Pandavas fortunes, or misfortunes, have been sealed by the hands of fate. And they must seek the abode of their destiny.

YUDHISHTHIRA

We beg leave to depart, king Dhritarashtra. Our dharma will be our gentle companion on this arduous journey. It will lead us to the path of righteousness.

DURYODHANA

Under every cloak of dharma, gentle cousin, a coward is buried alive. And trembling like a leaf. Fearing, lest his cowardice be known.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Once you wear it, wicked Duryodhana--this cloak of dharma, which you so piously hold in scorn, your heart will attain the purity of gold. Suffering no blight from the metals base, which conceal in their dull lustre the rust of envy and pride. Even those base metals are endowed with the sense of their own inferiority and worthlessness, my proud cousin, if you could only but look into your heart and ponder.

ARJUNA

(Murmuring to himself)

Mercury pales before Venus, when its anger is kindled against evil.

DURYODHANA

I need no such cloak, Yudhishtira. Dharma is my mistress, naked and shameless. The more I love it, the more it repulses me with mockery and disdain.

ARJUNA

Dharma is the fire of the conscience. Even when concealed against the mists in our thoughts, it never loses its light or warmth.

NAKULA

Lasting shame is yours, Duryodhana, in contrast to the eternal glory, which you deem you possess.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Thundering abruptly)

Silence all. Silence, I say! And listen to the confessions of an old, blind king. Pay heed, especially you, my sons, who stand accused of greed and wickedness. Yes, listen and pay heed. I had been wiser when I had made peace with my foes. And now my foolishness has guided me to condone the faults of my sons. How I forgive you all too quickly? Have I grown so old that I can't command obedience? Where is my wisdom, is it spinning on the wheels of sorrow? The hands of destiny are on my throat, and I am being choked. The lips of vice are kissing the cheeks of virtue, and the songs of dharma are no more. I can't see, I can't hear...no more, no more.

SAHADEVA

Brahmin is the home of all virtues, if one practices dharma.

KUNTI

Forgiveness is the greatest of all virtues.

[Krishna storms into the room, his hands joined palms up in salutations to all. A sudden hush pervades the room, as all hands with palms up are raised in mute greetings to welcome Krishna. The hands of king Dhiritarashtra remain listless in his lap. His expression calm and profound, as if no thundering thoughts had slipped forth on his lips.]

YUDHISHTHIRA

Krishna! I just thought about you, and you are already here.

KRISHNA

(Turning and facing the Pandava princes)

I travel faster than thought, my lord of Dharma. Whenever you need me, just think about me, and I will be there.

DRAUPADI

(Rushing toward Krishna, and falling at his feet)

Krishna! Remember, how I worshipped you, offering you milk and honey. And now, I don't even have the tears to offer you as a token of my love and devotion. You are my kingdom, Krishna, my friend and my savior.

KRISHNA

(His hands clasping Draupadi's and lifting her to her feet)

You deserve not just one kingdom, Queen Draupadi, but the whole wide world.

NAKULA

(Touching the hem of Krishna's robe)

Krishna, let me wash your feet with my tears.

DURYODHANA

(Abandoning the throne and flying to Krishna's side)

Krishna, you are not only my dear, beloved cousin, but the Lord of this universe. You are my Religion! The highest energy, the highest refuge, the highest penance, the highest wisdom, the most holy of the holies.

(Kneels at Krishna's feet)

Let me kiss your feet to welcome you in my palace. The whole of Hastinapura welcomes you.

KRISHNA

No fountains of penance or welcome can wash away your sins, Duryodhana, as to how you have treated your cousins.

DURYODHANA

I...

[Draupadi is watching Krishna in some sort of daze. Shock and disbelief are etched on Duryodhana's face, as he stands there speechless. Yudhishtira murmurs to himself]

YUDHISHTHIRA

Krishna. My Lord. You are the star that guides our lifeboat to safety.

KRISHNA

What do you think, Duryodhana! Am I ignorant of all that has happened? Or, that is still happening in your plotting and scheming mind?

RADHEYA

(Hurrying toward Duryodhana, and facing Krishna boldly)

Krishna! Duryodhana knows no sin. He rules over his kingdom most kindly and most justly. He is the lord over this earth, and the heavens shower blessings upon him.

KRISHNA

(Kindly, but sternly)

Blessed lies, Radheya, blessed lies. In your ignorance, you know not your greatness, and flaunt the false virtues of your master.

(Flashes a kind look at Kunti, who is watching him apprehensively)

KRISHNA (Continued)

Go, sit at the feet of your...Kunti devi, and invoke her blessings.

[Duryodhana begins to pace under some spell of mute misery.

Dussasna comes plodding down toward Krishna. His demeanor proud and haughty.]

DUSSASNA

Krishna, don't misjudge us by the evil canards, which travel faster than thoughts. We have treated our cousins justly, as ordained by fate.

KRISHNA

Hurl yourself into some darkest dungeon of hope and mercy, Dussasna, where my wrath can't reach you. You have soiled your hands with the most heinous of sins, when you touched queen Draupadi's hair, and dragged her from her palace.

[Dussasna stumbles back, horror shining in his eyes. He returns to his seat beside the king. His pride and haughtiness crushed. Radheya, seated at the feet of Kunti, watches him, though straining his ears to catch the words of the ladies.]

DHIRITARASHTRA

Krishna, come, sit by the king. My heart is heavy with sorrow. Yet I know that fate is more powerful than all the work of man.

KRISHNA

Forgive me, King Dhritarashtra, but I must not sit where my judgment might be clouded by the odor of sin. Fate is more powerful than all the work of man, as you think! But man cannot be molded like the wet clay. With his actions, he can choose the path of goodness to attain bliss. Or, he can follow the path to evil, plunging himself headlong into the pit of damnation.

DHIRITARASHTRA

How dare you insult the king, Krishna! You are no god, though ignorant people have raised you to such an exalted status. You are just another mortal, like my own sinful sons. Maybe, more lusty in your passions of love and hatred. You came here by the invitation of my son Duryodhana, I know. But he is regretting his decision this very moment, I am sure. You are not welcome in Hastinapura. You may depart as soon as you wish. Your pride makes you bold and disrespectful. Do you still claim yourself as one of the gods, both mortal and divine?

KRISHNA

I am the Beginning, the Middle and the End. And if people don't see my divine form, it's just that their mortal sights can't perceive the glories of Bhagwan all around them. At least, you have an impediment, my king. Your mental and physical blindness renders you incapable of seeing anything, but the joys and agonies in your own soul.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(His voice trembling, and his arms held out as if to embrace emptiness.)

Krishna! In my blindness, I can see, I can see! Yes, I can see your divine form. Forgive the old, sightless king, Krishna. You are all light, and this light is piercing my very soul. All the devas reside in you, Krishna. Your brow is the throne of Brahma, the Creator. Even the surdras at your chest are standing in utmost obedience to obey your commands. Indra, Varuna, Kubera, Yama! All the Lords of the four worlds are perched on your shoulders, carrying the banners of obedience to dispatch all into the darkness of the Underworld, if any dared defy your commands. Many arms have you, like the countless quivers in a bow. Oh, these mighty arms. Yes, they have the power to consume the sinners in a mad, mad dance of death and destruction. I can see, I can hear! Music and dance. Dance and music.

[A brief moment of hush is broken by a peal of laughter from Krishna's lips. Even Duryodhana has ceased his pacing, and is watching Krishna with utmost absorption.]

KRISHNA

Only the blind can see, and not be struck by the light of god in everyone of us. Sinners and virtuous, all of us!

SAKUNI

(Leaping to his feet, and approaching Krishna)

You are no god, Krishna. You have worked your evil spell on our blind king.

KRISHNA

The mountains of wickedness in your heart, Sakuni, will crumble soon, when the harm done to the Pandavas bounces back on you as the mountain of death.

DURYODHANA

There is no harm done to the Pandavas, Krishna. It was a fair game. Yudhishtira loves the game of dice. He kept playing like a man driven by fate, and lost all. Under the edict of such a fate, they were given two choices. Either to serve us as our slaves in Hastinapura, or to live like the dethroned kings, in exile. They made a wise choice. Why am I telling you all this? You know all, as usual.

KRISHNA

Injustice done to the Pandavas is reflected in your very eyes, Duryodhana. No lie escapes the all-seeing gaze of Krishna. Your thoughts cannot be concealed from me, either. You are thinking that you are the lord of this earth. This wide, wide world is not yours to rule and tyrannize. It cannot be won with deceit, but by valor.

DUSSASNA

(Mockingly)

And where is the valor of the Pandavas right now? In their humiliation, they can't even defend their queen.

KRISHNA

The noble Pandavas, Dussasna, even in their humiliation, respect the laws of dharma. Though you, the author of their humiliation, have resorted to the methods employed by cowards to win the worldly treasures.

DUSSASNA

(Brimming with mirth and derision)

Cowards indeed! We are the lords over this earth, while they have chosen the throne of ignominy.

KRISHNA

The seal of ignominy still shines bright on the brows of all the Kaurava princes, Dussasna. Didn't you all set their house of Lac on fire, when the Pandava princes were young. Hoping, that they would be consumed in the fire, without any blame on your pious heads.

DUSSASNA

We!

KRISHNA

And didn't you drag queen Draupadi by her hair? Oh, heavens! I can see doom lurking over your head like a cloud of fire and brimstone.

RADHEYA

Krishna, those are all base canards. Burning of the house of Lac! Dragging! I didn't see Dussasna drag queen Draupadi. I know for sure, the Kaurava princes to be virtuous, steadfast, and forbearing. They cultivate self-knowledge, and are favored by the gods.

KRISHNA

Once again, Radheya, let me remind you! Strive to know your own greatness in the innermost silence of your Ignorance. You are not one of the Kauravas, and restrain from serving your evil masters. Virtue, steadfastness and forbearance. And self-knowledge, are for the wise, who suffer neither pride, nor anger. The foolish suffer by the whirlwind of their own envy, pride and vanity. Always and forever, burning inside the fires of their own greeds and jealousies. And those are the supreme virtues of your Kaurava princes. Envy, pride, vanity, greed, jealousy.

GANDHARI

Krishna, do not favor Radheya. He is already bloated with pride by the love and devotion of Duryodhana. They have become the inseparable of friends. And your gentleness, Krishna, is making my sons rant and rave. Be harsh with them. Command Duryodhana to relent, and to let the Pandavas return to their palace of Indraprastha. He should learn to live in peace with his cousins. Oh, I can see death and doom, my accursed foresight! A great war...the fields of future soaked in blood...

KRISHNA

When one treats beasts with gentleness, Gandhari devi, they snarl and attack. But when one is harsh, they grovel and seek mercy. My gentleness is a flint to burn the rags of all lies, and to explore justice from the very ashes of Truth. If my gentleness fails, my harshness will lend them mercy. They have chosen defiance as their only shield of defense, but they cannot defy the edicts of death. I too can see death and devastation...the future bubbling in the fountains of blood.

KUNTI

(Murmuring to herself)

Chivalry is dead in the hearts of men.

DRAUPADI

(Her voice rising in one abrupt wail)

Krishna, judge all with your kindness. All the Kaurava princes. King Dhritarashtra. That sutaputra, Radheya! All, who watched me being insulted. Even my husbands! Arjuna, the great archer. Yudhishtira, the righteous one. My affectionate Bheema. My devoted Nakula. My handsome Sahadeva. Oh, all! Such agony! Wounds upon wounds! All must die, the Kaurava princes, not my husbands, not my husbands!

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Pleading)

Draupadi! Anger is a terrible thing. It blinds the inner eye, the eye of wisdom. It kills the soul.

DRAUPADI

(Her eyes blazing with rage and accusation)

A Khyaisra, who does not reveal his anger, is no Khyaisra at all. Just wrath is the ornament of a true Khyaisra.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Pressing his temples)

Now I am doomed, utterly doomed. I have lost my queen, my Draupadi. I have lost all! Her love, her heart, her respect!

KRISHNA

The value of the thing is never so poignantly precious, as to when we contemplate its loss. You will win back her love, Yudhishtira, I am certain. The fates have decreed that this boon be granted to you.

DURYHODHANA

The Pandavas have lured you away from our love and devotion toward you, Krishna. Their sense of dharma is to court misfortunes! For themselves, as well as for the others. Living in peace on the surface, and waging wars in their hearts. No more are they my cousins, these Pandavas. They are my enemies...always have been!

KRISHNA

Envy has been your greatest of enemies, Duryodhana, not the Pandavas. Even now, as all the elders have appealed, return the kingdom of Indraprastha to your cousins, and redress the wrongs done to the Pandavas. Let me see, if you can splinter your greed with the thorns of generosity! The quivers of righteousness hold no arrows to hurt anyone's pride, if you only knew? And you can unsheathe the sharp-edged sword of perception, if you are willing to let go of evil, and embrace goodness. It's not very difficult, all you have to do is to ask forgiveness of your cousins. And return the kingdom of Indraprastha to the rightful owners, the Pandavas.

DURYODHANA

Forgiveness! I have done nothing wrong, Krishna. The games of dice were played in all fairness. Yudhishtira lost, and I won. If I had lost, I would have surrendered my kingdoms without a protest. Remember Nala, the king of Nishadha. He had lost all his kingdoms in a game of dice. But he had won them all back in a game of dice, too. I am willing to invite Yudhishtira for another game of dice, but he has nothing left to lay the wagers. Indraprastha is mine. I have won it in all fairness.

[Krishna stands there immersed in deep thoughts, while Kunti murmurs to herself]

KUNTI

The sages have said: The creatures of earth inherit, to a certain extent, the patience and forgiving nature of mother earth.

KRISHNA

You have won the kingdom of Indraprastha with absolute deceit, Duryodhana, and you know it. By cheating in all the games of dice. Nothing can change that fact. And you can't deny it, even if you swore by the names of all the gods, and of the goddess' too.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Getting to his feet slowly, as if crushed by the weight of tragedy inside his own heart)

Krishna, you are the scepter of my dharma. Reins of my life are in your hands, and you are the charioteer of my fate.

ARJUNA

Yes, Krishna. In this storm ridden life of ours, we are like a boat caught in the gale. You will be the one to steer it to the shore.

DRAUPADI

Oh, woe to all! Cowards all. Yes, cowards all, my own husbands! The daughter of Fire stands here reviled and insulted, and no one to quench the fire of vengeance in her heart.

KRISHNA

(His very gaze soothing Draupadi, before resting on Yudhishtira)
The Pandava princes seek only truth, no one can deny that. And nothing will ever make them swerve from the path of righteousness, that is their dharma! The time of reckoning has come. Yudhishtira, now tell me. Keeping in mind your sense of righteousness, and given a choice? Would you avenge the insults of your queen, or fight for your kingdom lost?

YUDHISHTHIRA

I would forego many a kingdoms, than be unrighteous.

KRISHNA

Once again. Would you indulge in a game of dice, if you had means, to win back your kingdom?

YUDHISHTHIRA

Not ever again, Krishna. I would rather be a beggar on the streets, than claim any kingdom won by the game of dice.

BHEEMA

(Murmuring to himself)

Such is the state of things, that nothing can be averted, if the hands of gods are laid heavy on our hearts.

DRAUPADI

(Her gaze riveted to Krishna)

My only brave and loving husband. Yes, Bheema, also turned a coward.

SAHADEVA

The Kauravas deserve to be killed.

NAKULA

No, burnt alive on the bed of coals.

KRISHNA

The time of reckoning, yes. I am with you, my cousins, the sons of great Pandu. Rise against evil in a fashion befitting the Pandava princes. You have my permission to swear great oaths to avenge the insults to your queen. The forest of Dwaraka awaits you, but you will return to fulfill your great oaths.

YUDHISHTHIRA

My dharma now falls at your feet, Krishna. You are my refuge. My anchor, in my time of despair and hopelessness. My rower, to save my boat from the tempest of all calumnies. My savior, to lead me to the shore of peace. My heart is bled white by the arrows of insults shot at my queen by the very eyes and hands of the Kaurava princes. I swear that when I return from my exile, I will kill all the Kaurava princes. My very heart is ready to shoot arrows, which none can deflect but the gods.

KRISHNA

The mirror of truth in a man's soul reflects its purity through his words and speech. You have spoken justly, Yudhishtira, and with due reverence to all the gods. They are listening to your plight, even now.

DURYODHANA

Do you really approve the words of your self-righteous cousin here, Krishna? Yudhishtira, my everlasting foe! Bloated with pride, conceit and arrogance. He takes an oath to kill us all, when my promise stands true, that upon their return from their exile, Indraprastha is theirs to rule. How can you, Krishna, incite them to such blistering oaths? Knowing, that I, the noble heir of the noblest of kings, have been merciful in granting them the freedom in exile, instead of slavery in Hastinapura. Draupadi was not insulted by the Kaurava princes, but by her husbands alone!

KRISHNA

White lies and black truths! Your pride is great, and your arrogance greater than your pride, Duryodhana. Yet, your ego is the greatest, as compared with your pride and arrogance. Much greater, than all the hateful passions which you nurture and cultivate inside your heart with the seeds of evil.

DRAUPADI

Possessed with greed and pride, Duryodhana, you are doomed to suffer the most terrible of deaths.

[Duryodhana, in response to Draupadi's cutting remark, exposes his left thigh. Bheema, in an act of pouncing upon him, is restrained by Yudhishtira.]

YUDHISHTHIRA

Do not lose sight of dharma in the currents of your fury, Bheema.

BHEEMA

Do you think, Duryodhana, we didn't notice your gesture vile and obscene? If it was not for Yudhishtira, his dharma chaining us to silence and restraint, we would have killed each one of you by now. I swear, when our term of exile is over, I will break your thigh with my bare hands. Then, I will blow your head off with my mace, and trample all over your body till you are reduced to dust. Dussasna will be my next victim. I will drink blood from his heart, and break his hands for defiling the hair of my queen.

DUSSASNA

(Mirthful and mocking)

I can even hear the gods laughing at the boasts of the Pandavas.

KRISHNA

Gods are beyond the emotional aspects of the human beings, evil Dussasna.

DHIRITARASHTRA

And yet gods forgive. A doomed man must be saved from the danger, which is threatening to engulf him.

ARJUNA

(Flinging his arms up, and knotting his hands into a double fist)

Woe to those who tainted the sanctity of our queen Draupadi. I solemnly declare, that I will obey the commands of my brother and lord, Yudhishtira. Yet, I will slay Radheya, who dared laugh at the insults heaped upon us, and on our queen. The sun may swerve from its appointed orbit! The moon may lose the coolness which is part of her! But I will not swerve from this dread oath I have taken.

KRISHNA

A good man's anger is mightier than a hurricane with all its power of blight and violence. I will stand by you, Arjuna. For the sake of queen Draupadi! Making sure, that all the insults and injuries heaped upon her this woeful day, are washed away by the valors of all her husbands.

ARJUNA

The world would know, that Krishna sided with the Pandavas. And that would be my talisman, to avenge the insults to our queen.

KRISHNA

Your dharma alone, Arjuna, will grant you victory.

NAKULA

Where there is dharma, there is victory! And where Krishna is, there is dharma.

SAKUNI

(Laughing uncontrollably)

Empty boasts quickly sink into the rivers of shame. Pandavas will drink defeat from the very cups of their oaths. If they do not perish in the forest of Dwaraka, first! With, or without the help of Krishna.

SAHADEVA

When Krishna is on our side, even the thought of defeat is like a sacrilege against the purity of Light.

DRAUPADI

All you proud Kauravas! You will suffer agonies worse than death, when my husbands rise against you.

SAHADEVA

I swear, I will join hands with my brothers to kill all the Kauravas. But Sakuni is my prey I have selected to hunt on my own. Yes, Sakuni, you will be slain by my hands alone. You, who think that deceit is more powerful than valor. Amidst the war of vengeance, you could not be caught cheating. For, that is not the game of dice. But, you would be cheated by life, against the blanket of arrows from the very hands of Death.

NAKULA

My brothers have vowed to kill all of you, my wicked cousins. And I swear that I will kill all the sons of the Kaurava princes, so that no seed of evil is left on the face of this earth.

KRISHNA

With these oaths, I join mine with the Pandava brothers. My life is bound with them, for they are righteous. I swear, I will make this earth wet with the blood of the Kauravas, till queen Draupadi enters Indraprastha like the queen of the heavens. And till Yudhishtira returns to his palace as a lord of the earth.

BHEEMA

I myself will bind queen Draupadi's hair, and put the crown back on her head.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Raising his voice in an abrupt lament)

Yet, the great should forgive the faults of the ignorant.

GANDHARI

Could any be comforted, if the sun fell down on earth? Oh, darkness, darkness.

DRAUPADI

(Sails toward Krishna in a dream-like trance. Then falls at his feet, kissing them reverently)

You are the Father of this world, Krishna. Moving and Unmoving. Let me worship you with my sinful lips, right here. You are to be adored by the world. You are the greatest Guru (for) there exists none who is equal to you. How can there be then another, superior to You in the three worlds. O Being of unequalled Power! Krishna, Krishna, Krishna.

KRISHANA

(Lifting Draupadi to her feet)

Have patience and courage, Queen Draupadi. Your sorrows shall pass like the blinking of an eye.

DURYODHANA

(With one snort of a laughter)

You are no god, Krishna. You have your own mental and physical needs and passions, just like all the men on this earth. No one really believes that you have divine powers, not even the Pandavas.

KRISHNA

Everyone seems to know me, Duryodhana, except you and me.

DURYODHANA

If you don't know your own Self, Krishna, how are you going to whirl the fates around us? Or against us, while siding with the Pandavas?

KRISHNA

Yet, the fates are known to me. Cradling the kernel of my existence in their soft hands.

DURYODHANA

So, the blasted fates have commanded you to side with the Pandavas, and to abandon the Kauravas to their own Fate?

KRISHNA

No, Duryodhana. Fates can't command me. I command the fates. Now, for just this once, listen to me, and listen carefully. You have usurped the rights of the royal orphans--the Pandavas! The fatherless babes of the great King, Pandu. Now, for the last time, I am posing this question once again. Are you willing to return the kingdom of Indraprastha to their rightful kings, the Pandavas? If not, you will surely be whipped by the hands of your own cruel fates.

DURYODHANA

No, Krishna, no. I can't forswear my own decision and judgment.

KRISHNA

(Claiming Draupadi's hand, and taking one little step toward the door)

Come, Queen Draupadi. Let us not wait for the blinking of that Eye, which melts all sorrows into a pool of peace.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Murmuring)

A fitful fever...that is called life.

RADHEYA

Man is, after all, full of sinful thoughts and sinful actions. He is not able to look into the future and decide his present actions.

DUSSASNA

Strength of the army is mightier than the power of fate.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Dharma is with us, and fate is your enemy.

KRISHNA

Infamy and destruction await those, who have sinned most dreadfully.

DHIRITARASHTRA

Hope does not die, as long as there is some breath left to fan it to disaster.

GANDHARI

Fate can neither be averted by prayers, nor defeated by valor.

DURYODHANA

Yudhishtira, how are you going to look to the wants of your queen, now that you have lost your kingdom?

YUDHISHTHIRA

The loss of a kingdom is not much, dear cousin, when one is blessed with the bounties of love. And when, one's physical wants are so little, that they seem insignificant.

ARJUNA

Dharma is on our side, Duryodhana. Where there is dharma, there are no wants.

KRISHNA

The womb of time itself, will devour the wicked, who have dared pollute the seed of Dharma.

DURYODHANA

As your very generous cousin, Yudhishtira, let me order a chariot for you. It will transport you comfortably to your wild abode. Twelve years...thirteen long years! The blinking of an eye.

(Bursts out laughing)

YUDHISHTHIRA

I can't accept the debt of your generosity, my dear, dear cousin. My body is my chariot. My soul, its driver. And my senses, its steeds. Much more swifter than the wind, this chariot! It can drive one to destruction, or to the comfort of one great destination. And my chariot, I know, will hurl me back to the field of victory.

DURYODHANA

So, you think you can return to fight with us from that abode of the dead?

KUNTI

Yes, they will, Duryodhana. And no one is strong enough to fight with the sons of Kunti. You have won their kingdoms in a few games of dice, not with your valor. My sons, no one can ever defeat them! They are like the five pillars of the everlasting sky...noble and invincible. No blight can ever diminish their strengths. No tempest can ever uproot their Might. They are strong, for they stand firm on the foundations of Dharma.

DURYODHANA

(Laughing shamelessly)

The pride of a mother can lend no strength to the cowards. Yet, my cousins, mourn not the loss of Indraprastha. For, it mourns not your departure.

YUDHISHTHIRA

My Indraprastha is in your bondage, and it weeps, Duryodhana, it weeps. After thirteen years, I will release it from this bondage of shame, even at the cost

of a bloody war. For your greed, Duryodhana, I know, will not permit you to forego it peacefully.

[Pandavas are leaving. Draupadi is accompanied by Krishna on one side, and Yudhishtira on the other. Yudhishtira is craving Draupadi's attention.

YUDHISHTHIRA

My queen. The daughter of Fire! Leave the flaming torches of hatred in your eyes behind. You might burn your husbands to death, before they could leave this hateful palace of Hastinapura.

DRAUPADI

Hell is already preparing its fires, to receive the host of you.

KRISHNA

(Commanding over his shoulders)

Duryodhana, you must conquer your pride and avarice. And, pray, rule over your passions, if you wish to be a fit ruler over Indraprastha. Though, it is only for a brief period of thirteen years. The blinking of an eye!

The curtain

Act 3

Scene: A small house in the village of Upaplavya. One square room furnished with bare necessities. A couple of rough stools are covered with goatskin. The deer-skin rugs are scattered on the floor for warmth and seating. A few copper-pots are hung carelessly over the hearth. A set of earthenware, bowls, plates, and a jug of water, are abandoned on the floor near the hearth.

When the curtain opens, Yudhishtira is seen seated on a davenport covered with a woolen blanket. He is counting beads on his rosary, and watching Draupadi. Draupadi is pacing frantically, her hair unbound and her gown of blue muslin, loose and unkempt.

DRAUPADI

Thirteen years! Thirteen, long years of misery and indignity! And you sit here like a saint, as if the world doesn't exist, but in your saintly thoughts. Thirteen years of exile and penance, and you are still groveling before your cousins, craving for peace and amity. Striving not to win Indraprastha by force, but pleading for five poor villages from the bounteous wealths of the wicked, wicked Kauravas. Those barren strips of sand and thistle, which could not provide one bushel of corn to feed the wandering beasts. How can I help not thinking, that my husbands are cowards! It is your dharma sitting heavy on my heart, Yudhishtira, your dharma. Oh, don't look at me like that! With that light of love in your eyes? Piercing my very soul, and making me writhe in the greatest of miseries. Bhagwan, I cannot think, I can't think!

YUDHISHTHIRA

Come, sit with me, dear Draupadi. Come, sit down and rest. Insults rain down your lips like the arrows. You shoot them with such precision each day, that they have lost their power to wound me anymore. No, they never did--wound me! Coming from your sweet lips, my heart gathers them like the rose-petals. My

love for you is my dharma, Draupadi, and yet dharma is Truth. If one abandons dharma during this journey in life, it fails to accompany one in the passage toward death. No, I do not crave for those five villages as you accuse me so unjustly, my lovely queen, but for peace, yes. The names of those villages represent a subtle message, reminding the Kaurava princes of the injustices done to us. Even the blind king will not fail to catch the import of our concealed threat.

Yes, Varanvata, where they burnt our house of Lac. Jayanta, where they were stung with jealousy by our might and wealth. And how can they forget the village in Vrikaprastha, where Bheema was poisoned by the very commands of Duryodhana. Oh, heavens, now my memory fails me! My memory is blocking out the memories of all the injuries done to us by the Kauravas, my own cousins.

DRAUPADI

(Heedlessly)

And you have sent Krishna on this mission of peace. To beg the boon of paucity from your cousins! Five strips of barren land, ah, what mockery! And I tell you, my pious lord! If any god who walked on this earth as a mortal, it is he, it is he, Krishna, Krishna.

You have offended him. You have offended all the gods on earth and in the heavens. Krishna wanted no treaties with the wicked Kauravas. He advised you to wage a war, to win back Indraprastha. Didn't he say, that the Kauravas are unwilling to relinquish their hold on Indraprastha?

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Abandoning his rosary in his lap, and watching Draupadi with the warmth and tenderness of a doting husband)

Yes, lovely Draupadi, Yes. But my heart is filled with pity for the Kaurava princes. With its own tears of blood, it is pleading with me not to shed the blood of my own kin. How can I kill my own cousins? I know, their hearts are corrupted with pride and arrogance. And I know too well, that they are slaves to their own greeds and passions. And yet, ignorance alone is hurling them toward the gates of death, and yet again, I do not have the heart to stain my hands with their blood. My mind and heart, how they refuse to accept this burden of sin in killing all the Kauravas? Though, Krishna understands my warring thoughts. He wants peace with the Kauravas, as much as I do.

DRAUPADI

(Her eyes blazing)

Oh, agonies insufferable! What about the insults heaped on your queen? What about the oaths you all swore? Vengeance sits festering in my heart, and you talk of sin, pity, peace! Oh, these rivers of shame in my heart, churning in love for my husbands. It should be filled with pity. Pity, for all my husbands. The rivers of pity inside me, might appease my sufferings.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Easing himself up slowly and thoughtfully. His gaze following Draupadi)

Drenched with sorrow is my own heart at your sufferings, dear Draupadi, if that is any comfort to you. Do you know what war means, Draupadi? War is a pestilence, wreaking deaths upon many a countless victims, who have nothing to do with victory or vengeance. This ocean of tragedy and bloodshed, I am trying to purge with the venom of peace and goodwill. If Indraprastha can be regained with peace, our oaths will follow fulfillment. Gathering not the sin of countless murders, but wreaking vengeance on a few, who have dared injure your sacred heart with insults most vile and unforgivable. My efforts for peace are only for my loved ones, dear heart. For you, for my sons, for my brothers, and for Krishna, too. In times of wars, fates become more cruel than ever. Even Krishna could be defeated. Or worse yet, be killed!

DRAUPADI

(Mirth alighting in her eyes and on her lips)

To think that Krishna could be defeated? Even gods can't do it, and the sages are bewildered by his mighty powers.

YUDHISHTHIRA

And yet I fear, even now. He might be imprisoned by the Kauravas. I shouldn't have sent him on this mission of a peace treaty.

DRAUPADI

(Laughing without restraint)

To even think that Krishna could be defeated or imprisoned by any foes, is like a child trying to catch the moon.

YUDHISHTHIRA

It is easier to catch a whiff of breeze, Draupadi, than your wandering thoughts.

DRAUPADI

And my wandering husbands, and my sons. Where are they? Oh, how I forget. My sons, yes, they have gone back to the forest after the wedding of our eldest. Abhimanyu, isn't he the most handsome of all our sons, Yudhishtira? Oh, yes, he is. And my sons, learning the skills of archery and warfare. They are ready to kill the whole herd of Kaurava princes. And my husbands, cowards, cowards all. Didn't you all swear that you would land on the heads of the Kauravas like Fire, and would burn them to ashes? Where is that fire now? Smoldering no more! The fire in your heart, my lord, is it doing penance in the ashes of your craven thoughts? Bheema, even my mighty Bheema, has turned coward once again.

[Bheema straggles into the room, catching Draupadi's unkind remark with a bashful smile. He is cradling his mace in one arm, his fingers drumming on it absently.]

BHEEMA

Coward, you say, dear Draupadi, a coward. Bheema, a coward! How can you say that? You cut my heart to pieces. Remember, our last year of exile. In the palace of king Virata. How I had to assume the guise of a cook, so that our sinful cousins couldn't detect our whereabouts. Didn't I cook your suitor raw to death, when he tried to defile your sacred body with his lecherous advances?

[Yudhishtira seeks refuge on the davenport. Pressing his temples with both hands, and murmuring to himself]

YUDHISHTHIRA

Oh, those dark, lingering years of servitude. And my queen had to serve as a maid to the queen of king Virata.

DRAUPADI

(Laughter rippling in her eyes)

How can I forget, sweet Bheema! That evil Keechaka, the brother of the queen Sudeshna. How you impaled him in your strong arms, and crushed his very bones. Don't forget, how his brothers demanded that I be burned alive on the funeral pyre of Keechaka, and you killed all his brothers too. Oh, those rueful memories, and I can laugh about them now? How fates have crushed my very sense of pride? And wretched me! A queen, serving as a maid to another queen. Though Sudeshna...was kind and gentle.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Exclaiming with a sudden passion)

You shall be the queen of the world, Draupadi!

(His eyes are shining with the light of a prophecy, as he murmurs to himself)

YUDHISHTHIRA (Continued)

Though, I can smell the reek of death and surcease. The bubbles of agony ebbing and bursting. The torments insufferable!

BHEEMA

(Relinquishing his mace near the hearth, and murmuring sadly)

The just rewards of the Kauravas, all these agonies and torments, I hope.

[Arjuna storms into the room, the Gandiva slung at his waist carelessly. His face is flushed, and his eyes sparkling.]

ARJUNA

I shot a deer with one unerring aim! Now, what sadness is this? At least, acknowledge my success with smiles. Now that our term of exile is over, we should be rejoicing and feasting. Dancing with joy and wild abandon. Yudhishtira, have you made our queen unhappy once again? With your preaching and expounding? Peace and Dharma! Dharma and Peace! Oh, my lord and brother, have we become hermits all? Renouncing the pleasures of the world! Banished from ambition? Some men are destined to be unhappy, I dare say, even inside the ocean of boundless joy.

YUDHISHTHIRA

What joy, Arjuna? When our queen thinks, that all her husbands are cowards!

BHEEMA

Lovely Draupadi!

ARJUNA

, a coward! None of us deserve that epithet, dear Draupadi. You think I am a coward, do you? Just because, I had to assume the guise of a eunuch in the palace of king Varata?

DRAUPADI

Come, sweet Arjuna, don't feel crushed. Yudhishtira likes to exaggerate, as far as I am concerned. Such hopeful hours, slashed with hopelessness...I don't even know what I say! You are my pride and joy. The only one, entertaining me with dancing and singing.

ARJUNA

(With one gallant, sweeping curtsy)

The one and only eunuch, who is dying to entertain you with a blistering passion, when his term of one year with you commences this early spring. Alas, that each of us brothers have to share your true love for only one flash of a year!

YUDHISHTHIRA

So, you are still sore about sharing queen Draupadi with us.

[Nakula and Sahadeva enter together. Both are laughing.]

BHEEMA

Here come two more servants of the king Varata! A stable boy and a cowherder.

ARJUNA

(Approaching closer to Nakula and Sahadeva, and sniffing their clothes)

Now, which one of you stinks the most? I can't tell!

NAKULA

(Mirthfully)

Arjuna! I don't tend horses in the stables of king Varata anymore, you know. Some of us have to work, though. I have been felling wood, so that Draupadi can have some firewood to cook our meals. To feed us all, you know. And I smell of honest sweat, and I am starving too!

SAHADEVA

And I am no cowherder, dear Arjuna. Didn't you see me gardening? All morning, I have been digging and ploughing. My clothes smell of fresh roses and dewdrops. Oh, my stomach is groveling.

(Turning to Draupadi)

SAHADEVA (Continued)

Feed us, queen Draupadi, feed us.

DRAUPADI

(Sailing over to the hearth, where Bheema is watching the pot of rice with utmost absorption)

Go, wash up, sweet Nakula. And you too, sweet Sahadeva. Though you are wafting no smells or the stables or the barns, as Arjuna claims.

(Ladling the rice, and heaping the plates with each spoonful)

DRAUPADI (Continued)

My king and my lord Yudhishtira suffered the least in that last year of our exile. How difficult it could be to disguise oneself as a Brahman! And how the fortunes smiled on him when he got to play dice with king Varata.

(Hands one plate of rice to Bheema. Then carries the two in her both hands, one for Yudhishtira, and the other for Arjuna)

DRAUPADI

And you enjoyed playing dice with king Varata, sweet Yudhishtira, didn't you?

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Claiming one plate, his suffered tones barely audible)

I was forced to, my queen, as you know. I had no wish to indulge in any game of dice, as all my brothers are witness to my reluctance.

ARJUNA

(Protesting)

Our lord Yudhishtira suffered the most, dear Draupadi. How you forget! Remember, when the king was angry, and he threw a dice at Yudhishtira with the violence of a raging foe. That dice landed on his blessed head, and the blood streamed down his face, into his very eyes.

DRAUPADI

(Offering the second plate to Arjuna)

And I was the one who tended his wound! Half fearing, half swooning, lest the king chide me for not letting one drop of blood fall to the ground. And do you remember, why the king got angry with Yudhishtira, sweet Arjuna? Because Yudhishtira was singing your praises in helping the king's son to win the victory over the Trigartas. And that was the reason of the king's sudden anger. The king thought that Yudhishtira was robbing the king's son of his laurels of victory by singing the praises of your valor and strength.

ARJUNA

(Eating ravenously)

Ah, king's son, Uttara Kumara! He would not have won, if I were not his charioteer. I am the son of the lord of the heavens, Draupadi. And the brightest of stars in the galaxy of this world!

DRAUPADI

Pride of the Pandavas! If they could only summon their godlike strength in fighting the Kauravas.

BHEEMA

Don't mind Arjuna, my queen. His pride shines only when you are around. He tells us that you alone are his pride. And his savior too, whatever that means.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Arjuna is right, dear Draupadi. You are our Pride and Savior, both. You caught the blood from my wound in a bowl, and tended me like some angel from the heavens.

BHEEMA

(Laughing blissfully)

And letting the king know, that if one drop of blood from this Brahmin's head falls on the ground, his lands would suffer drought for one whole year.

DRAUPADI

(Smiling, and watching Bheema devour his food)

The king didn't believe me, or he would have hit me with the dice too. Don't eat too quickly, sweet Bheema. You won't be getting another plate of rice.

BHEEMA

Yes, Draupadi, you will give me one more plate, if I tell you a secret. A secret, which Arjuna kept from you. Remember that war with the Trigartas, when Arjuna became Uttara Kumara's charioteer, disguised as a eunuch! Trigartas were the friends of the Kauravas, and Kauravas came to their aid. And your sweet Arjuna fought with the Kauravas, and defeated them.

DRAUPADI

(Exclaiming with joy and disbelief)

The Kauravas, Arjuna! Why didn't you tell me? At least you fought with them, not for them, as you did in the forest. How long has it been, since the Kauravas came to the forest to look upon our shame with pride and gloating. And while they were gloating thus, they were captured by the Gandharvas. Those vile braggarts, your dear cousins. Had you not fought with the Gandharvas to succor their release, they would have remained in captivity for life. All you brothers, came to the rescue of your cousins then, to free those devils of greed. Why did you save them, I still can't understand! And their father, the blind king, who had usurped your father's kingdoms since you were the suckling babes, didn't even deign to send a word of gratitude. And your dear cousins too, did they ever thank you? Wearing pride and hauteur as their armor. Those ingrate gluttons, always feeding upon the wealths of the innocent victims. What reward did they give you for your valor and victory?

ARJUNA

(Murmuring softly)

It is my principle, dear Draupadi, not to accept anything in return for any good deed of mine.

BHEEMA

(Ladling more rice into his plate)

Our dharma helped us to be kind to our evil cousins, Draupadi. But Yudhishtira did chide Duryodhana: Spite never brings happiness. Didn't he tell them?

DRAUPADI

Yes, after he had welcomed his avaricious cousins with smiles. Telling them to return to their kingdom in peace, and wishing them health and happiness.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Don't forget, what else I said, dear Draupadi. I told them not to do such a stupid thing ever again, as to spy on us!

[Draupadi stands there watching Bheema, who is doing justice to his plate of rice with great urgency. Nakula and Sahadeva enter, both racing straight toward the copper pot.

NAKULA

I am so clean, I can eat out of my very hands.

SAHADEVA

My hands are numb and cold. That water in the stream sends shudders down my spine, even when I look at it.

[Both Nakula and Sahadeva ladle out big portions, while Bheema watches them greedily.]

DRAUPADI

Ah, my lords and fakirs. Their dharma feeds them not enough.

[Enter Krishna, his look wearied and thoughtful. He is welcomed by all with the usual greetings of palms joined, and poised above. The plates of food are abandoned for the moment.]

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Offering him a stool covered with goat-skin)

Here, Krishna. Sit and rest. You look tired.

DRUAPADI

Let me get you a plate of rice, Krishna. You must be hungry.

KRISHNA

(His gaze sweeping over all kindly and wearily)

Please continue with your meal.

(Turning to Draupadi)

KRISHNA (Continued)

I am not hungry, Queen Draupadi. And you, you are not eating. Where is your plate?

DRAUPADI

I am not hungry at this time of the day, Krishna.

BHEEMA

She only eats, Krishna, when I cook. Our queen has been spoiled by my cooking, ever since I became the head chef in the kitchen of king Varata. Though, it has been a year, I can't believe, and now I cook only for my Queen. When she permits me!

SAHADEVA

Let me wash your feet, Krishna, as I...

KRISHNA

(Interrupting with a kind gesture)

Finish your meal, Sahadeva. As Queen Draupadi will command you, I am sure.

ARJUNA

May I fetch you a glass of water, Krishna?

KRISHNA

(Lowering himself on the stool thoughtfully, and smiling)

I am not thirsty, Arjuna.

NAKULA

(Slipping a cushion under Krishna's feet)

This will lend you some warmth and comfort, Krishna. The journey from Hastinapura is awfully long, and your feet must be tired.

DRAUPADI

(Seating herself at Krishna's feet, and touching them wistfully)

Let me touch your feet, Krishna. For comfort and for blessings.

KRISHNA

(Bending low, and touching Draupadi's feet)

And let me touch your feet, Queen Draupadi, for twice the comfort and blessings. For heaven has made its own abode under the feet of a woman.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Smiling to himself)

Heaven, under the feet of a mother, Krishna.

[Nakula and Sahadeva plop themselves down beside Draupadi, while Bheema claims his seat next to Krishna.]

ARJUNA

It seems, Krishna, you don't bring favorable news from our warring cousins.

KRISHNA

The Kaurava princes do not wish to part, even with one strip of land belonging to you. Your Indraprastha lies in their bondage, to be freed by force. I knew, all my efforts to win peace would fail. I had this knowledge, Arjuna. And even in the wake of this knowledge, I tried my best. You must fight the Kaurava princes, now! The wheel of action should never cease its course. It must move. Churning, churning, always churning. That is called dharma. And action is the soul of man's dharma. Without which, the intellect of any man staggers toward annihilation.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(With a sudden burst of rage and passion)

My heart is like the sea, which has forgotten its boundaries of patience. Now it has landed on the shore of vengeance, to wreak havoc. We will fight the Kauravas, till queen Draupadi's insults are washed away in their blood.

DRAUPADI

That is my lord and my king speaking. Now, I recognize my sweet Yudhishtira.

BHEEMA

Yes, the days of our patience and forgiveness are over! I am thirsting for the blood of the Kaurava princes. The earth itself is thirsting for the blood of those sinners. I will bathe my hands in the blood of Dussasna, and will then bind the hair of my queen. Her wish to wear sandoor thus! will be fulfilled.

KRISHNA

Spoken like a true Khyastras.

DRAUPADI

Sweet, sweet Bheema, my heart is breaking with joy.

NAKULA

I will fight till the very end of Time, if any of the Kaurava princes escape alive. They have to pay for the insults to our queen, with the ransom of their blood.

DRAUPADI

(Delirious with joy)

Oh, sweet Nakula. Your valorous resolve has already comforted the pools of vengeance in my heart.

SAHADEVA

Like the straws caught in a sickle, the Kauravas will be blown away to pieces by the strength of my bare arms alone. The insults to our queen, which we have endured in silence, will be purged by their groans while they suffer the agonies of death.

DRAUPADI

Oh, I think I am dying. My sweet Sahadeva, my heart is choking with joy.

KRISHNA

(Sadly and tenderly)

You will not die, Queen Draupadi, not for a long, long time. You will live to rule as the Queen of the World. But remember, each joy is tainted with grief. Yet Krishna can lend you this much hope and promise, that all your husbands will return alive from this war, and will be the lords over this earth.

DRAUPADI

(Murmuring to herself)

And my sons, too!

ARJUNA

(His look troubled and profound)

Before we prepare ourselves for this war, Krishna, I wish to attain some semblance of peace within my heart. Living all this time in the forest, and with Yudhishtira as my mentor and my lord of Dharma, my thoughts have been troubled. Seeking the rungs of Truth inside the very fabric of Dharma. There is no hatred in my heart for my cousins anymore, but pity! I have been thinking, that it is better to die as a beggar, than to kill so many people for the sake of a worldly kingdom. Yudhishtira himself is to blame for such thoughts as these, for his own sense of dharma and forgiveness have led me toward this path of introspection. What is the purpose of life? What is this need to win peace over the stormy chaos inside our own hearts? Why should we wage wars, and kill and plunder? Is it our destiny, which is goading us to rain misfortunes on the very heads of our own cousins?

DRAUPADI

(Her look wild and stricken)

Arjuna!

KRISHNA

Destiny itself pulsates not with the breath of fortunes or misfortunes, Arjuna. Action alone lends it the power to hurl hurricanes, or to embrace the miracles of serenity in the calm, beautiful oceans of one's own life. Life! which, in our ignorance, we embrace as the turbulent sea within us; actually, is, the kingdom of Love and Understanding.

ARJUNA

Love and Understanding, are these not the illusions of the seers and the saints, Krishna? Virtues great and unfathomable! Who are the few fortunate ones, who strive to get closer to the shores of such Greatness, and explore these great virtues? For the sake of one's beloved kin, is it not right that one should relinquish all claims on the worldly wealths--even forget and forgive the insults? Why should we judge others, and brandish the whip of self-righteousness, when our own Self stays corrupted in the mire of doubt and confusion?

KRISHNA

Moral suicide! You are suffering from the want of Action, Arjuna. But first, you need to conquer your inner Self. If you fail to conquer that, you will always mistake your foes as friends, and friends as foes. And you will never be able to conquer your enemies in the war between good and evil.

ARJUNA

(With one snort of a laughter)

How does one conquer one's own Self, Krishna? When one loves one's Self too much to breed enemies within!

KRISHNA

Look within, Arjuna. Face your weakness'. These are your enemies. Your soul must become the battlefield, where goodness prevails and where evil perishes. Where Virtue alone, lives! Where love, pride and attachment surrender to the virtuous will of the soul. Where dharma sits on the throne of Bliss. And Bliss is the only worthy seat for dharma. From where, it guides men to the gates of valor and nobility. And they are the only ones, who are capable of waving the banners of justice, kindness and compassion, for all, to all.

ARJUNA

Don't you think your thoughts in rapport with mine, Krishna? You are talking about peace and bliss. Battles in one's heart and soul, to win peace within!

KRISHNA

I am talking about truth and justice, Arjuna. About the world, where justice is throttled by injustice, and truth by untruth. I am trying to awaken the slumbering need inside you. The need to fight this just war with the kauravas. The need to win this war!

ARJUNA

There is no peace then, Krishna, is there? War means death and bloodshed. The streams of agony and hopelessness for the victors and vanquished alike.

KRISHNA

This war is between the Noble and the Wicked. To right the wrongs done to the Pandavas. Between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness. And Pandavas are the Sons of Light, if you didn't know. And as for peace, dear Arjuna, it can be attained only, when chaos is stilled from within and without. When one knows his sense of duty. When one has the perception to judge Right from Wrong.

ARJUNA

Is it right to make others suffer, Krishna, when the wrongs done by others cease to hurt? Can you imagine the sufferings of the blind king, if all his sons were killed? And they will be killed, if we are to fight with them. No doubt about that, as you yourself know.

KRISHNA

The blind king is blind to the sufferings of the Pandava, if you didn't know. He knows neither remorse, nor compassion. Goodness enters his heart like a wayward stranger, only to breed his contempt for the ones who are good. Inside the dungeon of his own evil thoughts, he lives and prospers. And his thoughts hunger for evil, to feed more evil into the hearts of his sons and grandsons.

ARJUNA

And yet, he is like a father to me. How can I rain arrows over his head?

KRISHNA

And yet, you are forgetting the insults done to your queen! Heavens have prepared rewards for her sufferings. And for you too, though you think you suffer no more. And you will be losing those rewards, if you avenge not her insults. Your rewards are for this world and for the world to follow, if you only knew.

[All sit listening to this strange parlance as if stunned and bewildered. Even Arjuna and Krishna seem not aware of the others, as if they themselves are conversing in this dream-world of their own. Arjuna begins to pace, thinking aloud to himself.]

ARJUNA

And yet, Krishna. Nothing will wipe away my grief, if I kill my own cousins. Not even the rewards bestowed by the heavens, here and hereafter, can appease my guilt and sorrow. Where lies the Truth, Krishna, after which I am striving so hard? Is it greater than all the rewards promised by the heavens?

KRISHNA

Greater than the Himalayas with their unconquerable peaks! It has taken a vow of silence. Speech cannot move it, nor thought ever capture it. Truth is both illusive and self-revealing, Arjuna. It cannot be grabbed and jolted to confession. Our souls know this Truth, Arjuna, if we but looked within us. And each soul, like each truth, is imperishable. A wise man weeps neither for dead, nor for the living.

ARJUNA

Then what is this grief, Krishna? This grief! which makes men, both wise and foolish, weep over the losses of their beloved ones? And what is this evil desire, this Need, to murder one's own kin? Greater the need to weep, when one is branded as a murderer. Is the grief of any man evil then, who cannot help but weep over the sufferings of all, slain or injured--of dear or disdained?

KRISHNA

Grief sprouts from the root of delusion, Arjuna, not of evil. The slain and the slayer, both are one and the same in the tapestry of illusions. The one who kills, and the one who is killed, belong to the same fabric of illusions, which our imperfect sights can't catch and hold. Weapons cannot hurt the soul. Man cannot kill it, fire cannot burn it, earth cannot swallow it. Soul cannot be destroyed or annihilated. The soul is eternal! Once you realize that Truth, Arjuna, your acts will justify the end.

ARJUNA

Mystery of the Mysterious! Can I summon my soul before my sight, look into its eyes, and meet Truth face-to-face?

KRISHNA

With the help of the Third Eye, Arjuna. But remember this much, inside the Mystery of the Mysterious, that whenever anything is born, it is sure to die. And whenever anything dies, it is sure to be born again.

ARJUNA

And yet, peace never comes, even with this knowledge at hand. Does it, Krishna?

KRISHNA

Peace is, where fear, anger and desire are not!

ARJUNA

And without those, could any man suffer to live?

(His feet come to a slow halt before Krishna, his eyes dark and profound)

KRISHNA

(His own eyes kindling to warmth from some inner fire. His very gaze compelling Arjuna to look into his eyes)
 God has set us on this stage of life to perform certain tasks, Arjuna. Suffice it is to say, that inaction breeds sloth and misery. Action gains applause or rejection from the world, on how well we perform, or how bad our performance turns out to be. Even the mediocre are claimed as the winners in this world of failures and success'. Then imagine the men of might with their iron wills! What great feats they can accomplish? And you are the great hero of such a caliber. What you can achieve with one grain of your will, cannot be achieved by the others with their mountains of wills all combined. All you have to do is to beckon you will, and the field of great performance will open before you like an arena of victory.

ARJUNA

(Falling to his knees before Krishna, entranced and bewildered)

Forgive me, Krishna. You are my Lord. I have seen the light of sun and the heavens in your eyes. You are the mountain of strength, Krishna. A thousand Himalayas on earth cannot match your strength.

KRISHNA

(Smiling, and holding Arjuna captive in his gaze)

With your own mighty will, Arjuna, you can move all the mountains of strength, which you claim to see. With your will alone, you would crush the Kauravas, and they would never know whether an avalanche had landed on them, or a mountain had hit them on their heads. You will destroy their pride and deceit. They will be swept asunder by the hurricane of fire and brimstone from your very eyes.

ARJUNA

(Now, kissing Draupadi's feet and exclaiming)

Forgive me, my Queen! How I have played a coward all this time? A coward, unwilling to fight. A coward, who could forget all the insults heaped on his dear, dear wife! You were right, dear Draupadi, a coward. And an anathema to all my brothers, who are willing to avenge your insults. How you have suffered, Draupadi, how? And my sinful ramblings all this time? I can't even imagine to...

[King Dhritarashtra marches into the room, led by evil Sakuni. Bheema, Nakula, and Sahadeva leap to their feet. Arjuna eases himself up, dazed. Yudhishtira too gets to his feet, his look thoughtful and searching. Draupadi is watching the two intruders apprehensively. Hatred shining in her eyes.]

DHIRITARASHTRA

Sakuni, are all the Pandavas here?

SAKUNI

Yes, King Dhritarashtra. And Krishna, too!

DHIRITARASHTRA

I must speak my mind, Pandava princes. I have treated you like my own sons all these years, raising you from little babes to the mighty men of age. Now I am old and blind, and must plead with my own sons. Duryodhana doesn't heed me, and you stay on your own ground like the pillars of might. All this talk of war! Duryodhana, though I have advised him otherwise, stays adamant. Repeating to himself: unless there is a war, I will not relinquish the kingdom of Indraprastha. Now, my good sons, in the name of all the gods, and considering my venerable age, come to peaceful terms with Duryodhana. Your dharma has sustained you in your exile, and you have acquired the taste for an ascetic, carefree life. How easy it will be for you to return to the forest, and forget about the worldly kingdoms. Spend your days in learning wisdom from Nature, and strive for the kingdom in heaven. Lead the life of the sages and seers, and entertain not the thoughts of warfare. You have lived the life of dharma all your life, why forsake it now by your warring thoughts? Many a lives will be lost if you insist on this war, and you will gain nothing but grief and infamy.

BHEEMA

(Trundling forward and facing the proud intruders)

The war, which your sons so sinfully desire, you mean, King Dhritarashtra? This war will be fought and won. Won by us! The death of the sinners, your sons, King Dhritarashtra, will prove to the world that righteousness has gained victory. On the path of Truth we have always walked, and this Truth itself will free us from the bondage of your deceit and tyranny.

DHIRITARASHTRA

Is this not Bheema, who has the audacity to speak so rudely in the presence of a king? If I had sight, I could have burnt you all alive with the fire of anger in my eyes. My sons are virtuous! They are the pillars of Truth and Righteousness! And you Pandavas! you have been the bane of my life, all these years. Always plotting, always intriguing. The sinners, most hated!

NAKULA

(Chuckling to himself)

You make us look like the sinners, King Dhritarashtra? While your own sons have sinned against us most abominably!

[Kunti and Gandhari enter, led by Radheya.]

KUNTI

Oh, how I have pleaded with tears and laments, but of no avail.

(Ignores all breezily. Seeking refuge on the davenport and gasping for breath)

GANDHARI

(Staggering after Kunti, and sinking down beside her)

Oh, the sinners and the heedless! I see nothing, but death and destruction.

[Radheya seats himself at Kunti's feet. Sakuni watches him with the look of a fond indulgence. Krishna's gaze sweeps over all warmly, settling on Draupadi, and he smiles. Sahadeva is looking at Dhritarashtra, murmuring to himself.]

SAHADEVA

A king claiming himself to be the foundation of virtue. And accusing others of the sins, which he himself has committed many times over without the least bit of shame or remorse.

DHIRITARASHTRA

You think I can't hear you, Sahadeva. I know your voice too well! Your vile tongue has always made my sons suffer the most. And an old, blind king suffers no less. Warring thoughts have made you bold, Sahadeva...such insolence. Oh, how I suffer and suffer.

SAKUNI

I, for one, am not against the war.

KRISHNA

Your evil alone, Sakuni, has brought this cloud tragedy on the heads of both the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

DHIRITARASHTRA

Krishna! And I thought you were wise. You yourself are bent on destruction, by siding with the Pandavas, and urging them to raise the banners of war. And you must carry the burden of this war and tragedy on your shoulders, if no peace is to be found among these cousins.

KRISHNA

Wars, like fates, can neither be silenced, nor averted, o king. For, they must be fought. For the sake of both evil and good! Evil, once killed, knows the purity of goodness in its own cycle of rebirth and renewal. And good, once sundered apart from evil, nourishes even the buds of evil to the blooms of goodness in all of us.

KUNTI

(Whispering)

Radheya, my son, my son.

RADHEYA

(Whispering back)

Great sufferings are my lot, Mother! Since I have come to Hastinapura, I have been ravished by...fears.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Earth has been our bed for thirteen, long years, King Dhritarashtra, while your sons have slept in the silken comforts of their homes. And now the time has come, when the unmarked grave will serve them as their beds, and they will lie on the pillows of death and ignominy. Accursed forever!

DRAUPADI

Your greed alone, King Dhritarashtra, has made our hearts bleed for thirteen long years in misery and exile. And now, only the blood of the Kauravas could wash our pain and agony, endured by us all with prayer and fortitude.

GANDHARI

(Murmuring to herself)

Oh, these Sons of Darkness against the Sons of Light, as Krishna said. I have known that...my sons, my sons. My own sons!

[Duryodhana storms into the room, followed by Dussasna.]

DURYODHANA

How could you, my King and my Father? I had my doubts when Krishna left, but I could never fail to judge your moods and whims. You said you were going to the summer house! But, what I didn't know that everyone would be following you. And I know, why you are all here, suing for peace, how could you?

(His eyes flashing daggers at all)

DURYODHANA (Continued)

And Sakuni, how could you bring the king to such a wretched place? And my mother here too, and Kunti devi. And my friend and my brave warrior, Radheya, how could you be faithless to me? I didn't want to believe, and now how can I doubt. And as for you, my Pandava brothers, if I may say so! I will not give you any land, not even a land covered by the tip of a needle. And Arjuna, you will fight with my faithless, yet brave Radheya. He will fight, I know, and he will kill you. And Krishna, you are no god! And no gods are going to save the Pandavas from their destiny of death and shame.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Murmuring)

I too see death and shame. But it's not for the Pandavas. No, no, my sons, it's not for them. My own sons, and the sons of my sons.

ARJUNA

When Arjuna has decided to kill and destroy, dear Duryodhana, no force on earth can avert that death or destruction, except the gods. And gods are with us, due to the dharma of Yudhishtira alone. And you know, how we all have obeyed him in our exile and misery, in our suffering and degradation. And now he has given us the permission to fight. But still, it is you who desire war. And since you desire not peace, but war, then death will serve you as its hostage.

DUSSASNA

(Mocking with one snort of a laughter)

The suffered pride of the Pandavas! Yudhishtira is no saint, that all the gods will be rushing to his side...eager and obedient to the wills of the Pandavas.

RADHEYA

(Murmuring to Kunti)

Inside the rivers of my past, I have seen all this, Mother!

NAKULA

(Exclaiming suddenly)

Saint amongst men is Yudhishtira born!

GANDHARI

(Murmuring)

How right is Nakula, if only my son knew?

SAKUNI

(Derisively)

Do you believe in your saintliness, Yudhishtira, do you? Is your dharma going to save all your brothers from the fangs of death?

YUDHISHTHIRA

Bound by the shackles of dharma, I transgress not even in my thoughts, evil Sakuni

SAHADEVA

Like the thunderbolts we will attack and whip you to pieces, you boastful Kauravas. And our might will engulf you all in the fogs of dread and despair.

DURYODHANA

(Flashing a murderous look at Sahadeva, and then turning his attention to Krishna)
 This prig of a fledgling has just discovered his tongue, Krishna. Isn't it right? This is all your doing, Krishna. With you as their guide, the Pandava princes think that they can win this war. How sadly mistaken they are, Krishna! How tragically hopeful?

KRISHNA

Believe it, Duryodhana! Defeat of the Kauravas was writ with the quill of timelessness, even before the world was born.

KUNTI

This tragedy, as you speak of, Duryodhana, is going to fall on your head! Even now, you can avert it, if you will but banish your wicked resolve in fighting this war. In your grave, Indraprastha is not going to fit, even if you willed it to follow you to the very end of the world.

DRAUPADI

To hold fire in a piece of silk is as impossible as to gain this victory over Krishna! And by the sinners like you, Duryodhana, impossible indeed! Nothing can avert your downfall now! You stand vanquished by the very hands of fate, which is recorded in the book of timelessness, as Krishna has said. Draupadi will be avenged, yes, she will! You will die, yes, all of you, by the karma of your own greed, wickedness and ignorance!

DURYODHANA

(Laughing)

And you have prophesied this for the queen of the Pandavas, Krishna? Did you really? Can't you see the death of the Pandavas and their sons in the murky pools of your own prophecies? Don't tell me, you can't?

KRISHNA

My prophesies reveal nothing, Duryodhana, but a jungle most foul and dense. And in the middle of that jungle is a poisoned tree, hosting a nest of vipers. And that tree is king Dhritarashtra, bloated with the venom of pride and riches. And in that nest live the Kaurava princes, the vipers of greed and covetousness. All I see and know, my Prince of Darkness, is my need supreme to banish evil, so that good could be nurtured and foulness exiled. That tree must be destroyed from its very roots. And its branches pulled down, so that not even the air could breathe its corruption and carry it to the lands nether and beyond.

RADHEYA

(Murmuring to Kunti)

The ghost of my past haunts me with all its silent agonies, Mother. I see death and pools of blood. This earth, thirsting for more!

[Kunti's eyes are glazed with fear. She looks at Radheya hopelessly. Her lips move to form words, but no sound is issued forth. Her gaze is wild and pleading.]

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Thundering with rage)

Then war it is! My blindness is lending me sight. I can see the rivers of blood, staining the fields of Future. I can see, I can see, the sons of Pandu slain and dying, and the sons of the Pandavas writhing in agony. Death for the sons of Pandu, and death for the sons of the Pandavas!

DURYODHANA

(Joyfully)

Yes, war it is, Krishna. My holy father has spoken! He has seen the death of all the Pandavas, and there will be no sons left to lament the deaths of their fathers.

KRISHNA

(Smiling sadly)

Pandavas shall live to witness the death and ignominy of the Kauravas, Duryodhana. And even if their sons die, they will journey straight to the

heavens. Holding the light of purity in their souls as the emblem of prayer and sacrifice before the very throne of gods. And the gods will return this light of purity into the hearts of the righteous ones, the Pandavas. And the Pandavas are born to destroy the floods of evil with the rod of righteousness, fashioned out of their own bone and flesh.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Exclaiming passionately)

Yes, this war must be fought between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness! Our swords will mow down the Kauravas like the fields of corn and they will be blown away like the bundles of husk.

KUNTI

(Struggling to her feet and pleading with Radheya)

You must not side with Duryodhana. You must not fight with the Pandavas. You must not, you must promise me that!

RADHEYA

I can't make this promise to you, Kunti Devi, I can't. I have vowed to be Duryodhana's friend, and I will stay by his side, fighting till the very end.

GANDHARI

(Oblivious to all, and lamenting aloud)

Oh, death and devastation! Darkness and darkness! Rivers of blood, and the agonies most intolerable!

KRISHNA

Radheya, heed the pleas of Kunti devi. She speaks through the tongue of wisdom. Join hands with the Pandavas, and fight for their cause. This is the last chance the fate is offering you. Accept the hand of its mercy, and live!

RADHEYA

In death, I will meet the merciful fate face-to-face!

DURYODHANA

You will not die, Radheya, no! This cannot be! The fates have in store for you, Glory, not death! You will be my shield and armor, wreaking havoc in the very hearts of the Pandavas. Together, we will reduce all the Pandavas, our terrible foes, to the little heaps of dust! From where, they may rise, to be scattered into oblivion by the gentle mercy of the wind itself.

BHEEMA

You have always considered us as your foes, wicked Duryodhana! And now fate as your mighty foe is awaiting your death by the very hands of the Pandavas.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Lifting his arms up in the air, and commanding urgently)

This war of words must end! Battles cannot be fought by hurling insults, but by girding valor and challenge as the mightiest of weapons. This war which we are bent on fighting, should suffer no delay or compromise. The field of Kurukshetra will be our battleground. I command you, Pandava princes, to meet us there at the break of dawn. Our armies will confront yours no later than noon, and the fates themselves will decide the worth and the boast of the foe and friend alike.

DURODHANA

(His eyes kindling with the fire of joy and elation)

Kurukshetra, yes! That's the sacred field of combat--for the Kauravas. It gleams with the seal of victory for us!

KRISHNA

There is still time to avoid this terrible war, Duryodhana, if you can release Indraprastha from the bondage of your greed. That holy field of yours, at Kurukshetra, has nothing to offer you, but death and ignominy.

DURYODHANA

(Inhaling deep of his own pride and exhilaration)

Nothing will make me desist from this war, Krishna, nothing! My heart has been yearning for this war since the exile of the Pandavas. And now it is yearning

for the death of the Pandavas. I want to fight, and to efface the Pandavas from the face of this earth. No, this war cannot be avoided!

ARJUNA

You seem to get what you want, Duryodhana. And now, this battlefield will prove to be your eternal abode in death, if not the blessed reward of your evil yearnings. And if you are not humbled in death also, you will return to this world again, corrupted by more evil than ever before. Embracing a wretched death, more horrible than the last one. You will be born again and again! Caught in the whirlwind of a million lifetimes, till the grinding Wheel of Birth and Death will turn your Evil to dust, by the mere friction of its own cycle in nurturing a million blooms of good from the death of a single seed annihilated by its own evil.

GANDHARI

(Drifting toward her son as if in a dream. Her arms sweeping away emptiness before her)

I can see the clouds of death, hovering over your very head, Duryodhana. Run, run, and seek shelter somewhere else.

KUNTI

Radheya! Go not near Duryodhana, you too will be enveloped by the clouds of death.

DRAUPADI

The earth itself will drink the blood of the Kauravas.

SAKUNI

(Laughing stridently)

The bride of the heroes speaks! And the mother of the young heroes! yet to be tested on this warring ground. They will be slaughtered like the sheep on this field of Kurukshetra. Victory is ours! And the defeat of the Pandavas is written with the quill of timelessness, that's the prophecy of Sakuni.

DRAUPADI

Dust and ashes in your mouth, evil Sakuni. I would sooner believe that fire has lost its heat and has become as cool as the snow, than your boast and prophecy, predicting the defeat of the Pandavas. The Nemesis is standing right beside me, to avenge all the insults flung at queen Draupadi. It has marked your graves on the very field of Kurukshetra, and you will be bathed in blood, and no pyre to burn away your sins.

DURYODHANA

The fire of vengeance is not stilled in your heart, Draupadi! Has it, after all those years of exile and penance? How your eyes shine and flash daggers, still! And yet, the light of vengeance in your eyes, Draupadi, has no power to scorch us, but to kindle our valor in flames of wrath, which will consume your husbands without mercy.

KRISHNA

Your vile tongue, Duryodhana, and your heart burdened with the weight of greed and wickedness, are leading you to the very gates of death. The Kauravas will be vanquished by the very hands of the Pandavas, if not by the arms of grief and suffering in queen Draupadi's heart.

DURYODHANA

(Laughter and mockery trembling on his lips)

So, you have decided to act as a savior of the Pandavas, Krishna. Fighting with us, with words now, and with weapons, later. Imagine yourself...a godlike man, striving to kill his own kin in the name of righteousness. Have all the gods commanded you this ritual of murder and injustice? Are you going to gird yourself with weapons to murder your own kin and friends?

KRISHNA

I fight not with weapons, Duryodhana, but with wisdom. I favor the ones who are righteous, and you know who they are. Don't you, Duryodhana! And yet, when I

am moved to anger, lightning comes to my eyes and dwells there. And I need no weapon to kill, but with the flash of lightning in my gaze.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(His voice rising in one abrupt command)

Now leave us, Kaurava foes and friends. We will not fail to meet you on the field of battle at Kurukshetra. The first white thread of dawn will serve us as our messenger, announcing our arrival and the intent to fight.

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Turning suddenly, and colliding with Sakuni. A volley of laughter alights on his lips, slashed with the thunderbolts of pain and delirium)
The blind king and his Kaurava princes being dismissed by a lowly hermit of the forest! Death will greet you all at Kurukshetra.

DRAUPADI

(Waving her arms after Dhiritarashtra, while he is being escorted out by Sakuni)

Doom and death are your enemies on the field of Kurukshetra. They will jump at you from the very eyes of the dawn.

The Curtain

ACT 1V

Scene: The battleground on the field of Kurukshetra. A fierce fighting is in progress. The horns and conches are roaring. The clouds of war are raining arrows on each side of the armies amidst the din of the clanging swords. Arjuna's Gandiva encrusted with blue and gold stones, is wreaking havoc amongst the ranks of the desperate foes, who are garlanded in anticipation of their victory. Yudhishtira is commanding from the rear. Bheema's red bow, embellished with rubies, is drowning his foes in waves upon waves of arrows. Nakula's gold bow with emeralds, and Sahadeva's with golden bells, are shooting arrows with the speed of the bullets. The banner of the Kauravas with golden palm tree and five stars, is trembling in the wind. The banner of the Pandavas with serpent embroidered on the cloth of gold, is raised high on the chariot of Arjuna. All the Pandava and Kaurava princes with their hordes of armies are gathered here in this war of pride and vengeance. Not far from the battleground, is a small tent of silk, its flap raised facing the stage. When the curtain opens, the war drums are beating and the trumpets are blaring. Inside the tent, Kunti, Gandhari and Draupadi are seated on a large mat with pillows against their backs. Krishna is seated opposite. He is dressed in yellow silks, the great jewel, Kaustubha, on his chest, radiating its own light and warmth.

KUNTI

Radheya, Radheya! My first-born son! Fighting against his own brothers!
Against the Pandavas! Can anything be more tragic than this?

GANDHARI

I have known it to be so...all doubts are falling to pieces.

DRAUPADI

(Exclaiming. Shock and disbelief shining in her eyes)

Your first-born, Kunti Devi! How?

KRISHNA

The fates have decreed it so, Kunti Devi. Your laments will not altar the course of these events.

DRAUPADI

Your first-born, Kunti Devi? And I hate him so! Is he the son of Pandu? Tell me, tell me, or I will die of grief.

KUNTI

And I am speechless with grief!

DRAUPADI

(Pleading with Krishna)

Lord Krishna, tell me! It seems everyone knows. Why was I kept in the dark? Tell me, Lord Krishna, is Radheya really the son of Kunti devi, not a sutaputra? Is Pandu his father?

KRISHNA

Forgive me, Queen Draupadi, my lips are sealed. Kunti devi, if she wishes, can enlighten you on this subject.

DRAUPADI

Kunti Devi, please!

KUNTI

My heart is drowned in the rivers of my own pain, Draupadi. How can I tell, dear Draupadi, how can I? Don't press me. Oh, the bride of my five heroes, how can I taint the purity of your heart? Yes, my heart, hobbling over the slain and the dying! Gathering more blood in its own bloodbath of grief and sorrow. Its bloodshot eyes are watching, watching the wounds of death and suffering. Oh, darkness, darkness all.

DRAUPADI

(Returning her pleading gaze to Krishna)

Please, Lord Krishna!

GANDHARI

(Murmuring to herself)

No need to know, when death will silence all.

KRISHNA

Kunti devi, please, solve this riddle of Radheya, for this suffered queen. This will distract your mind from the woes of war.

KUNTI

(Heaving one prolonged sigh)

Oh, Child, I was a child then, when this fortune or misfortune, I don't know which, came my way. One day, a guest arrived in our palace in the city of Kuntibhoja, where my parents used to live. He was no ordinary guest, but a vrishni known by the name of Sage Durvasa. My father, king Soorna, after receiving this guest, summoned me to his presence, and instructed me to attend to the needs of this sage with due respect and obedience. I obeyed my father as I was instructed, and in return, Durvasa was charmed by my manners. Before leaving he asked me if I wanted a boon from him. I said, yes, and he taught me one small incantation. He said that after reciting this incantation, if I wished for any deva, all I had to do was to whisper the name in my head, and that deva will come to me. Next morning when I woke up, I saw the bright Sun peering through my window. The incantation taught by Durvasa was coming to my mind, and I wished the Sun could come to me. Suddenly, I was blinded by a fountain of light. Standing by my bed was the Sun, robed in its own aura of warmth and sunshine. He smiled and said: Now that you have summoned me, little girl, what do you want to do with me? I can still hear myself chirping! Nothing, I just wanted to see if my incantation worked. This is not so, the Sun was smiling tenderly. Didn't the Sage say that any god you invoked, would come to you? Now I will embrace you, and will give you a son as beautiful as the god you have summoned. I cried and pleaded, but he embraced me. Then he told me,

that after the birth of my son, I will remain a virgin. After I had given birth to my son, I was so ashamed and bewildered, that I had put him in a basket and had thrown him into the waters of Ganga. Oh, my beloved Radheya, Radheya.

[Kunti was wringing her hands, her eyes burning and flashing.

Gandhari was oblivious to all, but to her own mute reflections. Her eyes were smoldering, and her frown deepening.]

KRISHNA

And now you know all, Queen Draupadi.

DRAUPADI

(Overwhelmed with agog and sorrow)

Not all, Lord Krishna, not all! I didn't know, gods could...well. How was Radheya saved? And how did Kunti devi recognize him when he returned as a full-grown man?

KRISHNA

No one can miss noticing the kachava on Radheya's wrist and the kundalas in his ears, as you yourself have seen, Queen Draupadi. Those were the gifts of Sun-god to his son. He was born with the kachava on his wrist and kundalas in his ears. Kunti devi could recognize him anywhere in the world, with or without the gifts from Sun-god. And as to Radheya's survival, his basket was found floating down the currents of Ganga by a charioteer named, Atiratha. His wife Radha brought him up as her own son. This childless couple reared him with much love and care, and named him Radheya. When Radheya chanced to come to Hastinapura, Kunti devi claimed him as her son, keeping the secret of his father to herself. Though Radheya had to know, pleading with Kunti devi, and weeping. Only a mother can tell who is the father of her son, he would weep and exclaim? The rest you know, or can guess, Queen Draupadi.

GANDHARI

(Her eyes glazed and unseeing)

The agonies of death! The groans of the wounded! I can hear all and see all, the dying and the suffering.

KUNTI

(Her wild gaze turning to Krishna)

Tell me, Lord Krishna, is Radheya going to die?

DRAUPADI

(Her murmurous tones gathering the sting of accusations)

And you are not concerned about the five heroes, my husbands, Kunti Devi. And about your own sons, the Pandavas, my brave husbands!

KRISHNA

How can I tell, Kunti Devi?

KUNTI

You can, Lord Krishna, you can. You are the Lord of the world, and you know everything!

KRISHNA

Even the lords of the worlds stand mute, when fates are let loose to defend Good against Evil.

GANDHARI

And yet, Lord Krishna, you must tell me, if my sons are going to die in this war? And my husband too! And my grandsons, my babes? Oh, this rueful day!

KRISHNA

Queen Gandhari, you are blessed with the sight of divination to look into the future much more swiftly, than I can. You can see it clearly in your heart, even before I can blink my eyes to summon the Field of Destruction before my sight.

GANDHARI

Oh, accursed fate and accursed me! I see the clouds of death floating over the heads of my sons. How can I believe that my own sons are the sons of Darkness? Pandavas are bathed in the light of purity...the sons of Light! I wish I was

blind like my king and husband. What do I see now? King Dhiritarashtra is fainting...falling to his feet. Life ebbing away from his old limbs!

DRAUPADI

Oh, my sons, my sons! Will I ever see them again! Will my husbands come back alive, my husbands and heroes?

KRISHNA

(Getting to his feet, and turning to leave)

I must get back to the battlefield. My inner sight goads me to action. Arjuna is vacillating, and Radheya is not putting his heart into this fight.

KUNTI

Would you aid and protect my Radheya, Lord Krishna?

KRISHNA

(Without looking back)

You would not plead and lament, Kunti Devi, if you only knew.

(He leaves, lowering the flap of the tent behind him. Walks slowly toward the battleground. Halts not far from Arjuna and Radheya, who are shooting arrows at each other without the will to fight.)

KRISHNA

You two need to replenish your strength, or this kind of fighting would last for days, if not for years! Come, Radheya, your may rest. And Arjuna, fly to the aid of your brothers, they sure need your help.

[Arjuna races to the side of Bheema, who is under fierce assault from Dussasna and a group of soldiers. Radheya faces Krishna, his gaze bright and burning.]

KRISHNA

If you had watched yourself fighting with your brother, you would have said, your heart was not in this fight, and you would hate to kill him. You love Arjuna too much, is that so?

RADHEYA

No, Lord Krishna. I feel neither love, nor hatred in my heart. My eyes have seen the Light! My father, the Sun-god is with me. I am being dissolved into his presence. I am going to die, Lord Krishna, I am going to die. On this very field of Kurukshetra! To be with my father, in heaven. I am sure that the Pandavas are going to win this war.

KRISHNA

(Sadly)

What makes you so sure, Radheya? How can you tell?

RADHEYA

(A profound and enigmatic smile curling on his lips)

Don't tell me, Lord Krishna, you don't know what this war signifies! You know that this field of Kurukshetra on which we are fighting, is a sacred ground. And this war is a supreme Sacrifice to the God of Heaven. You are the master of the ceremonies on this field, Lord Krishna. And Arjuna is the star performer. All the other brothers are puppets in your hands, if you didn't know. They will dance in obedience to your own will alone, Lord Krishna. Your energy and might is flowing into their very veins, I can see. The end is clear. My dreams are my divinations. Pandavas will be the victors. Look, Lord Krishna! Even now, Arjuna is returning by your own will, to challenge me to another duel?

KRISHNA

(Without looking)

You are wrong, Radheya. Arjuna is distraught, and wearied of fighting. His heart is not in this war.

[Even before Arjuna approaches closer, Duryodhana is heard pleading for Radheya's help.]

DURYODHANA

Come, Radheya, come. Don't abandon me now. Can't you see, all these evil hermits are swarming around me like the foul leeches!

[Radheya flies to the side of Duryodhana. Arjuna faces Krishna. Fatigue sits heavy on his brow and shoulders, and his eyes are shining with disgust for this war.]

KRISHNA

What burden of woe are you carrying on your shoulders, Arjuna? Don't you want to avenge the insults to your queen?

ARJUNA

Yes, Krishna, yes. With all my heart and soul! But I would rather be killed by my cousins, than kill them! I long for death.

KRISHNA

The greatest archer in the world, and entertaining cowardly thoughts! Imagine that, Arjuna? There is one thing more powerful than all the weapons of death, and that is the unwillingness to live. It battles death as nothing else can! You are shaping your own destiny, and you are destined to live. Whether you take misery as your bride, or wed valor as your lord, the choice is yours alone.

ARJUNA

What choice, Krishna, when all the gods are siding with the Kauravas? Look, how they are fighting like the hissing serpents, and invoking their gods with prayers and laments. We have no chance of winning, against the army of their gods.

KRISHNA

Even all devotees, who are endowed with faith and invoke or worship other gods, invoke and worship Me alone, o son of Kunti, but by the wrong method. The Kauravas are going to suffer an ignominious defeat, I can assure you without a doubt.

ARJUNA

Can you divine the wills of the gods, Krishna, can you? The sage, the saint, the prophet, all in one! The truth is, I have lost faith in you. This warring, thundering reality before my sight is nothing but an illusion. My quest for truth, for which I strove all those years, ends here, now, on this field of Kurukshetra. How can I believe in you, when you stand here goading us to shed the blood of our own kin?

KRISHNA

Your kins, the Kauravas! And are they not willing to shed your blood, prompted by the flood of evil in them? Oh, Arjuna, your quest for truth stands outside the realm of time and future. Heed my words, and be comforted in your thoughts. When once we accept the infinite Reality as 'one-without-a-second', remaining the same in the past and future, it is evident that the Self, as consciousness-- that expresses through the equipment of all saints, sages, prophets and incarnations of the past, is one and the same.

ARJUNA

And you know everything, Krishna! The past, the present and the future?

KRISHNA

Yes. I am the Origin and the Dissolution of the Whole universe. Beyond Me is Naught. All this is strung in Me, as a ray of jewels in a thread.

ARJUNA

(Laughing suddenly)

And yet, you show me not your divine form! And you are Ananta among the Nagas, are you?

KRISHNA

I am Varuna among the water deities. Aryana among the ancestors. And I am Yama among the controllers.

ARJUNA

(Delirious with mirth)

And you are going to return our fame and fortunes back to us! Making our Draupadi the queen of the world?

KRISHANA

Fame and Fortune; Speech and Memory; Intelligence and Steadfastness, and Patience Am I, of the feminine qualities.

ARJUNA

(Hysterically)

And Draupadi said, you are the Father of the world?

KRISHNA

I indeed am the Father of the universe, who places the sperm-of-life in the womb of the universe. Action is life, Arjuna, and right action, the purity of the soul. And wrong action, the impurity in living. And inaction, the ultimate death. Remember this...

[The parlance between Arjuna and Krishna is disrupted by a sudden noise from the conches and the trumpets. The Kauravas are gaining victory over the Pandavas, it is obvious. Arjuna is startled to his feet, racing toward Yudhishtira, who is being pelted with the arrows from the untiring bows of Sakuni and Dussasna. A war of words is surfing along, along with the war of weapons. Radheya and Duryodhana are fighting with Nakula and Sahadeva.]

DURYODHANA

Now, look you, Shuddering colts, we are already wearing the garlands of victory around our necks.

SAHADEVA

This garland around your neck is your noose of death, Duryodhana, which you cannot cast away, even if you tried. It will choke you before you can plead mercy from the very gods, who are hurling you to your own ruin and death. These flowers which you are so proud to wear will be kindled to one hoary glow by the fire in our very eyes. Soaked in your own blood, they will lay heavy on the pyre of your defeat.

NAKULA

In the gilded nest of sin, you have lived all your life! And now, death and ignominy will be your rewards.

RADHEYA

(Murmuring to himself)

Oh, these dreams and divinations again! Nakula and Sahadeva in white silks! Wearing garlands of jewels and flowers on their arms and necks.

ARJUNA

(Coming to Yudhishtira's aid, and raining arrows on Sakuni and Dussasna)
You will be whipped like cotton by my rage, and burnt to cinders by the fire of my revenge.

SAKUNI

(Mockery and laughter shining in his eyes)

Arjuna, you are fit only to dance in the harem of king Varata! How can you fight the godlike Kauravas?

ARJUNA

The dance of death is the only dance I am skilled in performing, evil Sakuni. I have learnt it from my father, if you didn't know.

DUSSASNA

(Laughing derisively)

Cowards all! You are cowards all. We insulted your queen, and not one of you was man enough to challenge us. And now, you talk about killing? Braggarts all!

YUDHISHTHIRA

Our dharma, you vile vermin, made us swallow your insults. It is like swallowing medicine which leaves a bad taste in the mouth, as it heals the afflictions of the body and soul. Now, its affect is gone, and our hearts are bloated with the venom of vengeance. You will taste this venom, to the very bitter end of your life. You will not die until you have suffered the agonies of death, and the tortures of the damned.

DUSSASNA

And where are your mighty oaths now? Do you have the courage to repeat them before killing us, instead of just bragging?

ARJUNA

We don't need to repeat our oaths, wicked Dussasna! Your broken promises have lent them the tongues of their own! The tongues of fire, I say, and they will burn your very greed to ashes, 'ere your pride can heave its last.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Murmuring to himself)

It was to avoid this war, that I suffered thirteen years of exile!

BHEEMA

(Entering this circle of shooting arrows and insults)

Come, Dussasna, fight a duel with me! I will repeat my oath, and drink blood from your heart as I swore.

DUSSASNA

(Brandishing his sword)

A lowly cook, challenging a brave prince! You are good at wielding the cooking ladle, but wielding your mace requires a greater skill than tinkering with the pots and pans. Hide this good mace in your apron, brother, and prepare us a feast of victory.

BHEEMA

(Raising his mace over Dussasna's head)

Cooking has taught me to carve a man's body to such a precision, that his heart falls throbbing at my feet, split into two equal halves. Such a feast I promise you! A feast fit for any brave knight, who is corrupted by the giblets of his own greed and deceit.

(Strikes a violent blow over his head before Dussasna's sword could slit his throat)

[Dussasna slumps down to the ground. A heartrending cry escapes his lips, before the agony of life is comforted by the hands of death. Bheema, hugging his mace, stampedes in the direction where Krishna is standing. A general melee erupts forth between the armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas.]

BHEEMA

And now, Lord Krishna! Should I tear out Dussasna's heart, and drink his blood as sworn?

KRISHNA

Not until the victory is complete, Bheema! There is not a single moment to waste. Rush to the side of your brothers. Look, how Sakuni, Radheya and Duryodhana are crowding around Nakula and Sahadeva! They need your help, Bheema, hurry!

[Bheema joins his brothers. Krishna stand there, watching sadly and intensely.]

DURYODHANA

Nakula, you base herder of cows! Get away from my princely sight, or I will cut your very arrogance with my blood-thirsty sword. My only weakness is that my heart pities too much the young colts like you. Sheath your sword, and wager not your life on the sea of my rage and pity. Against my valor and strength, you all will crumble like the castles of sand.

NAKULA

Give your tongue some rest, Duryodhana, and let our weapons clash. Valor or prowess on either side, will stand as a judge to announce the winner or the loser.

[They both start fighting, While Sakuni challenges Sahadeva.]

SAKUNI

You stinking groom of horses, come, fight with me. I have no pity for the young colts like you, and I will kill you with joy.

SAHADEVA

(Throwing a javelin at him with unerring aim)

You have tasted the cup of joy in life, and have drained it to the last drop. Now dregs of sorrow, you may swallow out of that empty cup!

[The javelin hits Sakuni's breast. He falls to the ground without even uttering a groan. Duryodhana groans with despair and commands.]

DURYODHANA

No victory is assigned to anyone in the war of words! Let us rain down arrows on our foes, and annihilate their boasts.

ARJUNA

(Storming forth, his eyes flashing arrows)

This Gandiva of mine is my veena. It plays sweet music on the throats of my foes. The hum of arrows! The chimes of death! Killing all, who have dared usurp our kingdoms.

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Fighting and killing indiscriminately, and shouting over his shoulders)

When a lion comes out of his captivity, he destroys the whole jungle.

DURYODHANA

Arjuna, this Gandiva is just your ornament that you wear on your shoulders, it has no power to slay even a moth. Killing us all! don't wager higher stakes than you can afford.

ARJUNA

Today, my wager is Life, not Dice! This Gandiva of mine does not know how to throw dice, and its only ornament are the stinging arrows.

RADHEYA

My arrows glow with the fire of the Sun, Arjuna! Accept a challenge to fight a duel with me, and you will see. I can kill the whole host of the Pandavas with my bare hands alone.

ARJUNA

Your head is too precious, Radheya. Keep it on your shoulders a while longer, before I toss it away to the winds. You must leave Duryodhana to his own evil fate. Fight with the Pandavas, not against them, and you will win a boon of jewels and kingdoms.

RADHEYA

Victory is not a woman that you can win with the promises of jewels, Arjuna, but to woo with the diamond of strength.

DURYODHANA

Yes, mighty Arjuna. Accept the challenge of my brave Radheya. Fate has summoned you to the gates of death today!

RADHEYA

(Murmuring to himself)

And yet, I see a white halo over the head of Arjuna. It is rising like a beacon of light.

BHEEMA

(Confronting Duryodhana)

I have come to challenge you to a duel, Duryodhana. Accept it with grace. You will pay for the insults to our queen, this very day.

DURYODHANA

(Laughing. His gaze sweeping over all. Lingered on Krishna, who had approached closer, and then returning to Bheema)

Arjuna will be killed by Radheya! And you, Bheema, cannot escape the agony of death from my very own hands. And Krishna too will die!

YUDHISHTHIRA

(One groan of an exclamation ringing loud on his lips, while he keeps fighting)

No, that cannot be! No, no, a thousand times, no! Arjuna and Bheema are my two eyes. And Krishna, my Mind! What is the use of living, if I lose all three!

BHEEMA

(Flying to the aid of Yudhishtira, and shouting his disgust at Duryodhana over his shoulders)
Duryodhana! So, you are afraid to accept my challenge, you rat! You have risen against us like a great pestilence...like an army of rats, and you all must be destroyed.

[Krishna moves closer to Arjuna and Radheya. Their eyes are locked together, as if both are suspended in some mists of resignation and timelessness. Duryodhana's own attention is diverted to Arjuna and Radheya. His gaze intense and profound, as if he had not even heard Bheema's insults]

ARJUNA

Yet, my heart still moves toward you with kindness, Radheya. I will spare your life yet another day, but I must kill you tomorrow.

KRISHNA

What you have planned for Tomorrow, must be done Today.

RADHEYA

Are you not accepting my challenge, Arjuna, is that it? Are you afraid of death and defeat?

ARJUNA

If the Sun can lose its power to shine, then Pandavas may be defeated. Not until then, Radheya, not until then.

[Both Arjuna and Radheya commence their fighting. Radheya's arrows are being deflected from Arjuna's body, as if by the will of the Providence. Radheya's chest and shoulders are pierced with arrows from Arjuna's Gandiva. Another quick arrow pierces Radheya's neck. He crumbles to the ground, blood oozing forth from his neck and staining his garments. Bheema and Yudhishtira have also overcome their foes, and are now returning to confront Duryodhana.]

DURYODHANA

(In a fit of madness and hysteria)

Oh, woe to us all! Oh, evil Arjuna! You have become a murderer in the sight of us all! My pride and my armor, Radheya, dead. Dead! murdered by Arjuna. I will avenge his death.

(Rushes to Radheya's side. Kneels down, and clasps his hand into his own. His gaze mute and bewildered, as he drops his head over Radheya's shoulders)

KRISHNA

Don't feel proud of the falsehood that you speak, Duryodhana. You are the murderer! before the sight of all men, as well as before the sight of all gods.

DURYODHANA

(Lifting his head, and crying hysterically)

The rivers of blood will not stop flowing, until each one of the Pandavas are dead!

YUDHISHTHIRA

Dharma is on our side. Where dharma is, victory is there!

KRISHNA

When a god of death comes to the battlefield, all are consumed.

DURYODHANA

(Leaping to his feet, and challenging Bheema)

Come, Bheema, you have challenged me before! Now, I will kill you. Then, I will kill all the rest of the Pandavas. Drowning you all in the blood-bath of my rage and vengeance.

BHEEMA

You are yet to be stung by your own pride, Duryodhana, if not killed by my own rage. You come like the hissing serpents, while we fight like the lions.

DURYODHANA

(Lifting his mace, murder shining in his eyes)

Come, Bheema. You and your foul, stinking oaths! They were all a string of words.

BHEEMA

They were the oaths of Light, Duryodhana, not a string of words. And my oath will cling around your neck like the noose of death.

[Both Bheema and Duryodhana are engaged in a combat of life and death, wielding their maces with the skill of the jugglers. Duryodhana seems to have the upper hand. But Bheema is agile and calculating. In a flash, Bheema rushes toward Duryodhana, aiming his mace at the chest of his hated foe. Duryodhana leaps in the air to ward off this imminent blow. But Bheema strikes at his thighs with the violence of a raging wolf. Duryodhana crashes to the ground in a heap, his broken legs collapsing under him. One terrible groan from his lips fills the battleground in a sepulchral hush.]

BHEEMA

(Tossing his mace at Duryodhana's feet, jumps on his chest. Then he crushes his head under his feet, and laughs hysterically)
Now, I have fulfilled my oath. I have broken your thighs, Duryodhana, as I did swear.

[Suddenly, the conches and trumpets are blaring. Announcing the victory for the Pandavas. The Kaurava soldiers are fleeing pell-mell against the banners of Serpent embroidered on cloth of gold. The field of Kurukshetra is strewn with the bodies of the slain and the dying. All the Pandava princes are alive and jubilant. They form a circle around Krishna, singing and dancing.]

CHORUS

Where Krishna is, there is victory.

KRISHNA

Restraint in joy and sorrow is for the wise. Grief sits beside joy like an everlasting arbiter. Don't forget the deaths of all your sons. How will Queen Draupadi drink this draught of joy and sorrow? Her grief must be appeased. Though, you will have many more sons, to rule over many more kingdoms on the face of this earth.

BHEEMA

(Still drunk with joy and exhilaration, breaks away from the circle)
Now, I will wash my hands with the blood of Dussasna, and bind Draupadi's hair.

[The four Pandava brothers slump to the ground, dazed and exhausted. Krishna amidst them is still standing. His look forlorn and detached. While Bheema is smearing his hands with the blood of Dussasna, the drums begin to sound the victory for the Pandavas. The flap of the tent is thrown open, and all the queens are racing toward the blood-soaked field. Suddenly, Krishna flings his arms up in the air. His eyes are drooped shut, and a string of words falls trembling on his lips.]

KRISHNA

Oh, wicked and unfortunate Kauravas! Such sinners that you were, that you had to die in a battle to reach the heavens. Your belief in martyrdom has served you all as your guillotine. Such a terrible life, and such a horrible end! Despite your riches and comforts, you must not have been fond of life, that you chose to die such wretched deaths. Shunning peace! Welcoming greed!

DRAUPADI

(Her gaze wild and flashing)
My heroes, my husbands! I see you all. But where are my sons? They are not dead, are they? My sons, my sons...

GANDHARI

(Stumbling over the corpses)
Oh, woe and darkness! Are all my sons dead?

KUNTI

(Searching one corpse after the other. Her gaze wild and mourning)
Yes, the Pandavas, my sons are safe. Safe and alive. But where is Radheya? My Radheya...Radheya, my son...

BHEEMA

Dear Draupadi, I have fulfilled my oath. Let me bind your hair now. Look, the blood of Dussasna, the sandoor in your hair!

[Bheema binds Draupadi's hair, while she closes her eyes. Wailing and lamenting.]

DRAUPADI

My sons, my sons! Are they all gone? Murdered by the enemy! Ah, the evil Kauravas! Even in their death, they can mock me...fresh wounds, fresh insults...Death is my enemy now, death and darkness. My sons, my sons! Where are they now?

KRISHNA

Death is not the enemy which conquers life, if we only knew. But it returns to us as a friend, with a promise of uniting the Lover with the Beloved.

GANDHARI

(Kneeling by the dead body of her son, and wringing her hands)
Alas, grief is my portion...has been, since Duryodhana was born. Oh, I have been warned. How many times, I have been warned? How can sin be born out of the womb of love...I do not know, I do not know! And where is the blind king? Is he not coming to witness my grief?

[Dhiritarashtra enters the stage, feeling his way slowly and awkwardly. He seems to be following the voice of Gandhari, though drifting amongst the dead. Stumbling and swaying, yet maintaining his balance with the help of his cane.]

GANDHARI

Oh, this sin, born out of my own pure womb! Can that be true? Now I know, how sin bleeds! How pride suffers! How deceit festers! How ignorance wallow in the dust of its own grief and sorrow? But grief! The grief of a mother...

(Becomes aware of Dhiritarashtra stumbling to her side. Watching him, mute and inconsolable)

DHIRITARASHTRA

So, all my sons are dead?

GANDHARI

Oh, grief, like love, is blind! Loving both the good and the bad...in children, is that Love? Loving both the agony and the emptiness, is that grief? My children, all my children! My sons, all my sons, dead!

(Her eyes turning to her husband with the violence of murder)

GANDHARI (Continued)

Grief, like the love of a father...no, not so! Blind husband, blind to fate! Blind King, blind to wickedness! Blind father, blind to the follies of his own sons! Have you come to witness the glory of defeat, my King, the defeat of your sons? Can your sightless eyes not weep? In evil and darkness, you have spent all your life, plotting and suffering. Your own sins have drowned your sons into the rivers of death and corruption.

DHIRITARASHTRA

Are all my sons gone, and my grandsons too? Are they really dead, Gandhari? Are they, my suffered queen?

GANDHARI

(Weeping and beating her breast)

Oh, if only I had the power to pluck my eyes out of their sockets and give them to you! Then you would know what grief is, watching the wounded and the slain bodies of your sons with your own eyes! Oh, why does not the grief strike me blind? Is there anyone left to comfort the grieving mother.

DRAUPADI

Spurred by fate, we become deaf and blind. Who is to comfort whom?

KUNTI

Oh, Radheya, my son, my son! How bitter is the end! I lost you in a nightmare, and found you in a dream! Now you are lost to me in all eternity. Oh, the most horrible of all the nightmares I have ever had? Alas, my eldest one, the son of god, is dead. My first-born, the beloved of Lord Suriya! My Sun-god, come, comfort your grieving bride. Oh, my son! Sacrificed in this battle like an innocent lamb. Kurukshetra, isn't this the sacred field, the field of holy Sacrifice? How do I know, what do I know? My son, my innocent lamb is given in Sacrifice to god Suriya, to redeem the sins of the Kauravas...the sins of the world? My Sun-god has taken my child, and yet the Pandavas live and they are victorious. Righteousness will live...but my son, my son...

KRISHNA

Lord Dharma had come back to walk on this earth, Kunti Devi. I plead, that you do not grieve.

DHIRITARASHTRA

And the dharma of the Pandavas, is it not destroyed on this field of Kurukshetra? Dancing a death-dance in the pools of blood...the blood of their own cousins!

KUNTI

Oh, sightless, sightless world! Behold this grief, and look through the eyes of a mother. And if this grief doesn't lend you sight, World, then...oh, I cannot see, I cannot see.

(Rubs her eyes vigorously. Then raises her sightless gaze toward the sky)

KUNTI (Continued)

No, I do see! I see the Light in Darkness. Radheya is sitting in the lap of god Suriya. My Sun-god is comforting him. Father loving his Son. The Son enjoying the Love and Kingdom of his Father. Oh, Heaven, where is the earth? Why am I floating? Lord Dharma is carrying me on its wings, to, to...

DRAUPADI

(Drifting toward Kunti as if in a dream)

I have lost all my sons too, Kunti Devi, and I am still sane. You have lost but one son, and you have gone insane with grief...and blind too!

KUNTI

No, o bride of my five heroes, no! In my blindness, I can see. And the truth has torn its veil off before my insanity, if that is what you name grief.

DRAUPADI

(Edging closer, and watching the flush of joy in her transfigured features)

What do you see, Kunti Devi? How can you see, your eyes are glazed?

KUNTI

(Lifting her hands up with palms joined)

Look into my eyes, Draupadi. Can't you see? My Lord, my Sun-god is with me. Forgive me, Lord Suriya. I didn't know I was chosen to bear this son, so that all the sins of the world by this one act of holy Sacrifice...through him, through his sacred breath could be washed. Accept my gratitude, Lord Suriya, accept and forgive. Blessed am I to bear such a son! And blessed is Radheya in the Kingdom of his Father.

KRISHNA

(Smiling sadly)

Blessings on the whole wide world from all the gods in heaven, or on earth. I feel I have drunk the wine of gods from your words, Kunti Devi. The sweet Amrita, which the gods drink, is now flowing sweetly in my veins.

GANDHARI

(Lamenting and beating her breast once again)

Oh, grief! This overwhelming grief! Oh, these silks scar my flesh, when the bodies of all my sons are covered with dust and blood. How my heart throbs and

thunders! Something in there is tearing and churning. How am I going to avenge the deaths of my sons? Kauravas, all dead. My babes, all gone!

YUDHISHTHIRA

(Getting to his feet laboriously, and pleading with Gandhari)

Don't grieve, Queen Gandhari. Please, our hearts are breaking. We are your sons now, and we will be devoted to you. Loving and caring, always. If you but heed the voice of dharma, it will soothe your pain and grief. Under the shade of righteousness, we all will prosper, and comfort each other.

GANDHARI

After killing my sons, and wallowing in the mire of sins, how can you talk of righteousness? Sin and corruption still soiling your body and soul?

DHIRITARASHTRA

(His own anger flaring, which he had stifled under the mantle of his mute anguish)

What evil tongues you have, you Pandava brothers! You can never claim yourselves as the sons of the Kauravas. Into the deepest pit of miseries, I will condemn you all! yet, and ever again. In exile and banishment, you will stay and suffer forever more. Thirteen times over thirteen years, and multiplied by thirteen more centuries, you will rot inside the graves of your own lives.

GANDHARI

I was just raving, my King. My blind king, I was just raving! But the curtain of Ignorance has blinded your sense of judgment, as well as your senses. Now, we have no sons, but the Pandavas. Yudhishtira must be proclaimed a king to carry on the legacy of the Kauravas and the Pandavas both. Oh, I had seen this fate...somewhere, into the eyes of the time past and the time to come! Had I not known my grief, even before I was wedded?

DHIRITARASHTRA

My anger will burn you all to ashes, even you, my queen! My proud Gandhari! Grief has killed your sanity. In madness, you are still raving!

GANDHARI

The ways of Providence are mysterious, my King. Grief has killed the sanity of us all. The loss of your sons has not humbled you, though. Grief has not humbled you, either. In life, you stand proud. In death, you shall be humbled.

(Beckoning Yudhishtira to her side)

GANDHARI (Continued)

Come, Yudhishtira. Embrace the queen, and you will rule over the kingdoms of this earth for many, many years to come. You were kingly, even in your garments of bark, when you had to suffer your exile for thirteen, long, long years.

[Yudhishtira falls into the welcoming embrace of Gandhari's arms. Dhiritarashtra covers his face, his hands and body trembling visibly.]

DHIRITARASHTRA

(Uncovering his face, his arms and legs shuddering)

Mysterious fates, how enigmatic! I never thought that such mysteries could be unraveled in my soul, in my old age. I never knew, I could welcome the grief-stricken fates themselves, save alone the grieving Pandavas. Come, Yudhishtira, be a staff in my hand. Arjuna, Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva, come you too, be my sight. I might embrace the pillars of righteousness, yet. Dharma might humble my pride and bitterness, yet more?

[All the Pandavas embrace king Dhiritarashtra]

GANDHARI

Has dharma gained a victory? Is Righteousness sleeping over the grave of death? Have my insults been washed and cleansed? Can the rod of my vengeance not heal the wounds of my grief? Oh, my sons, my babes!

KUNTI

How grief has summoned joy to its side! The Sun-god himself has dried my tears. Radheya, my holy child, my blessed son. Speak to your mother. Ask a boon from your father. Summon me to death...to life!

KRISHNA

Souls die not. Living as eternally as dharma.

KUNTI

(Holding out her arms)

Is Dharma the estranged mate of life? Oh, how my joy and grief overwhelm me! Come, queens. Come, the bride of my heroes. Pray for the death of old Kunti.

(Gandhari and Draupadi are swept into one eager embrace by Kunti)

DHIRITARASHTRA

Yudhishthira, you were born a king. Rule over my heart, son, and prosper.

YUDHISHTHIRA

Righteous men rule over the kingdoms of earth, yet I am ruled by the kingdoms of heaven, in the name of dharma alone. Its rewards are bounteous in the end, though we perceive not in our miseries and struggles.

KRISHNA

The gods have come down to rule over the kingdoms of this earth.

CHORUS BY ALL

Dharma is victory.

The Curtain