

amar
chitra
katha

Tales of Yudhishtira

174



RETOLD FROM THE MAHABHARATA

Yudhishtira, the eldest of the five Pandava princes, was born to Kunti by the grace of Yama. His actions were free from passion and prejudice. He came to be considered the very embodiment of Dharma and was respectfully referred to as Dharmaraja.

Yama, the awe-inspiring God of death, is also revered as the Lord of Justice. According to Hindu belief, all living beings reap the fruit of their actions after death. Yama administers justice to all the beings brought before him. Since he metes out justice strictly according to *Dharma*, he is called Yamadharma. Who else could test Yudhishtira but Yamadharma? Yudhishtira emerged from the ordeals a stronger soul.



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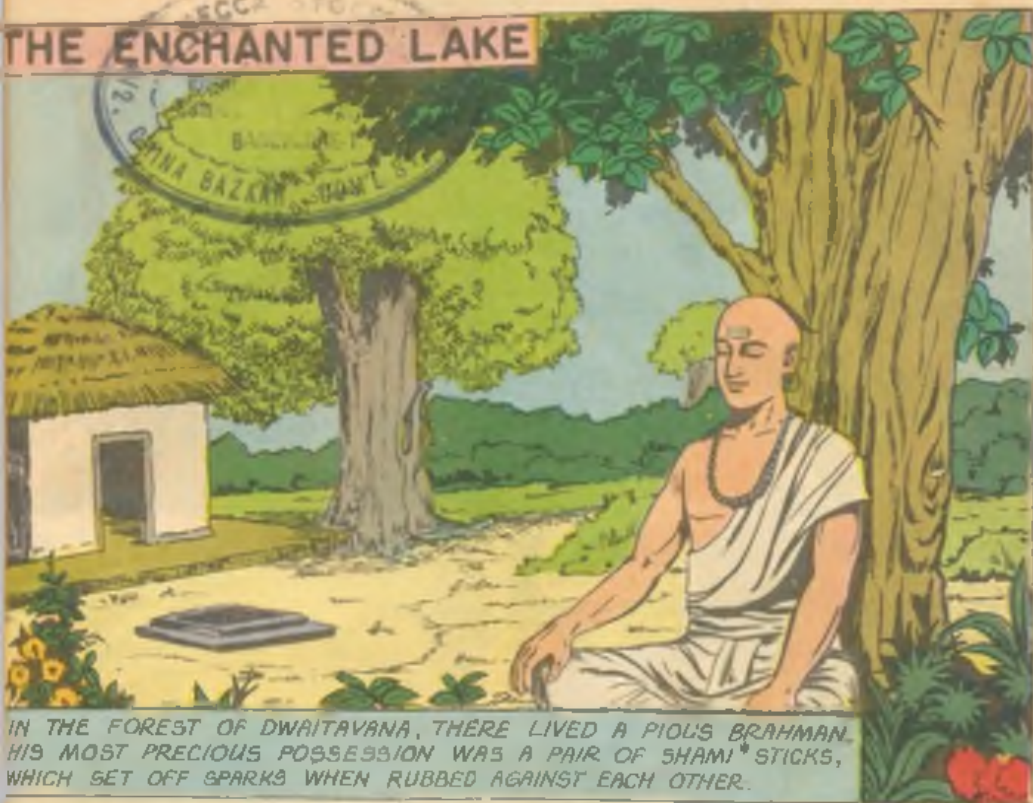
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THE ENCHANTED LAKE



IN THE FOREST OF DWAITAVANA, THERE LIVED A PIOUS BRAHMAN. HIS MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSION WAS A PAIR OF SHAMI STICKS, WHICH SET OFF SPARKS WHEN RUBBED AGAINST EACH OTHER.

HE USED THESE STICKS TO LIGHT THE FIRE...

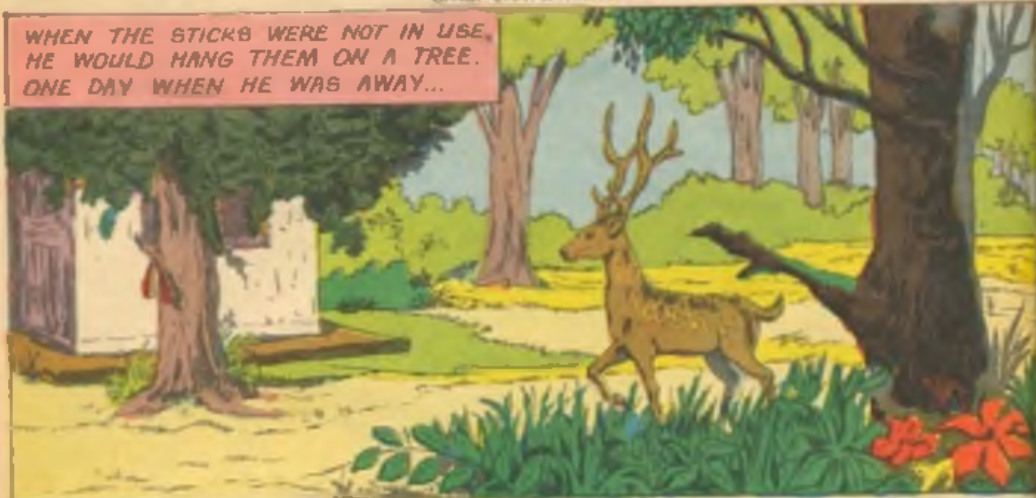


...FOR HIS YAGNAS.



SHAMI WOOD WAS USED FOR KINDLING THE YAGNA OR SACRIFICIAL FIRE.

WHEN THE STICKS WERE NOT IN USE,
HE WOULD HANG THEM ON A TREE.
ONE DAY WHEN HE WAS AWAY...



...A DEER CAME UP TO THE TREE AND
PLAYFULLY BUTTED THE STICKS...



...AND THEY GOT ENTANGLED IN
ITS ANTLERS.



LATER, WHEN THE BRAHMAN
RETURNED TO HIS COTTAGE —

MY
STICKS!



HE DROPPED THE BUNDLE OF DRY TWIGS AND RAN AFTER THE DEER.

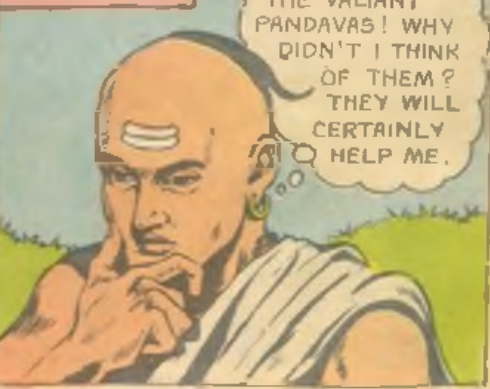


AT THE BRAHMAN, WHO WAS NO MATCH FOR THE SWIFT ANIMAL, SOON HAD TO GIVE UP THE CHASE.



I HAVE LOST MY PRECIOUS STICKS FOREVER. WHAT SHALL I DO? WHOM SHALL I TURN TO FOR HELP?

AS HE TURNED TO GO BACK TO HIS HERMITAGE, A THOUGHT SUDDENLY STRUCK HIM.



THE VALIANT PANDAVAS! WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THEM? THEY WILL CERTAINLY HELP ME.

THE PANDAVA PRINCES, WHO HAD LOST THEIR KINGDOM TO THEIR WILY COUSINS, WERE NOW LIVING IN EXILE WITH THEIR WIFE DRAUPADI.



WHEN THE BRAHMAN STOOD BEFORE THEM, YUDHISHTHIRA, THE ELDEST PANDAVA, WAS THE FIRST TO SPEAK.

O KING, ONLY YOU CAN SAVE ME!

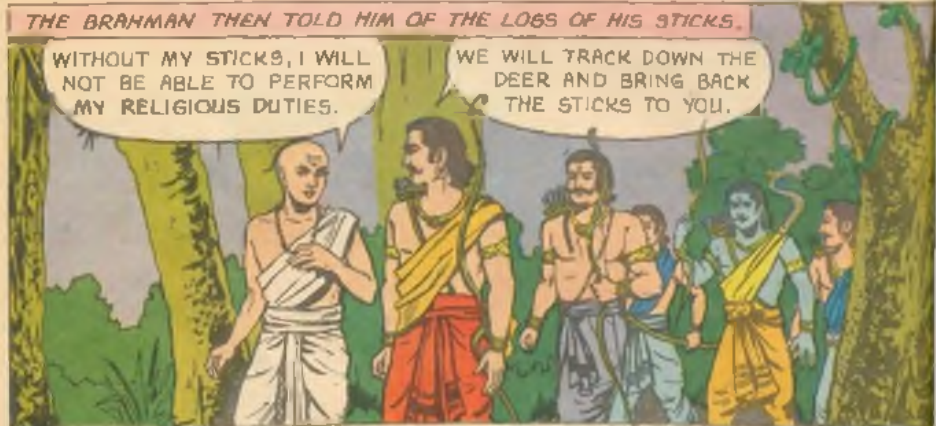
WELCOME TO OUR HERMITAGE! IS THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO FOR YOU?



THE BRAHMAN THEN TOLD HIM OF THE LOSS OF HIS STICKS.

WITHOUT MY STICKS, I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PERFORM MY RELIGIOUS DUTIES.

WE WILL TRACK DOWN THE DEER AND BRING BACK THE STICKS TO YOU.



THE PANDAVAS SET OUT, FOR A WHILE THEY HAD NO LUCK, THEN SUDDENLY—

DEER TRACKS! LET US FOLLOW THEM.



AT LAST, FAR, FAR AWAY FROM THEIR HERMITAGE—

LOOK! THE DEER!



THE PANDAVAS CHASED THE DEER AND SHOT AT IT, BUT IN VAIN.



FOR, SUDDENLY—



IT HAS VANISHED!

WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW?

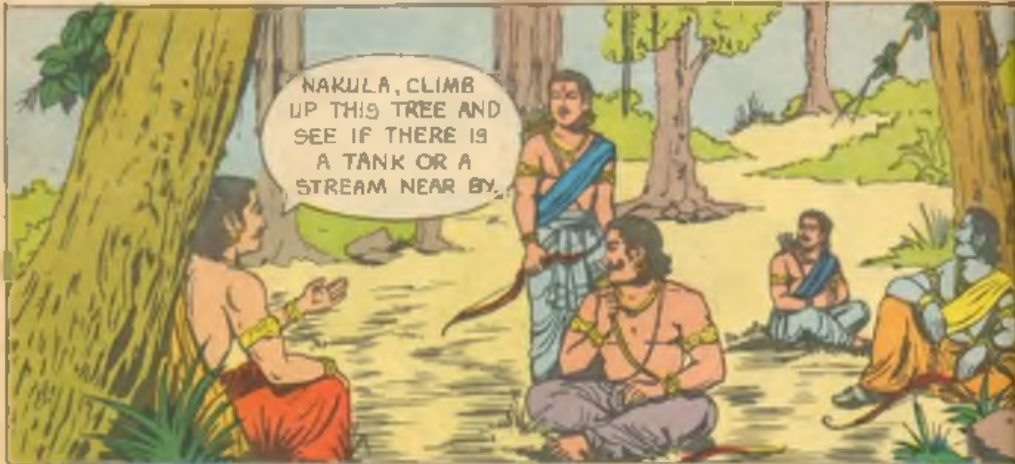


WE MUST FIND IT AGAIN. LET US CONTINUE THE HUNT.



I AM TIRED, HUNGRY AND THIRSTY.

THEN LET US REST BEFORE WE GO ON.



HE RUSHED TO THE LAKE.

WAIT! THIS LAKE BELONGS TO ME. YOU MAY DRINK FROM IT ONLY AFTER YOU ANSWER MY QUESTIONS.



NAKULA LOOKED AROUND. THERE WAS NO ONE IN SIGHT.

WHO COULD IT BE?



I'LL FIND OUT AFTER I HAVE...



...QUENCHED MY THIRST.

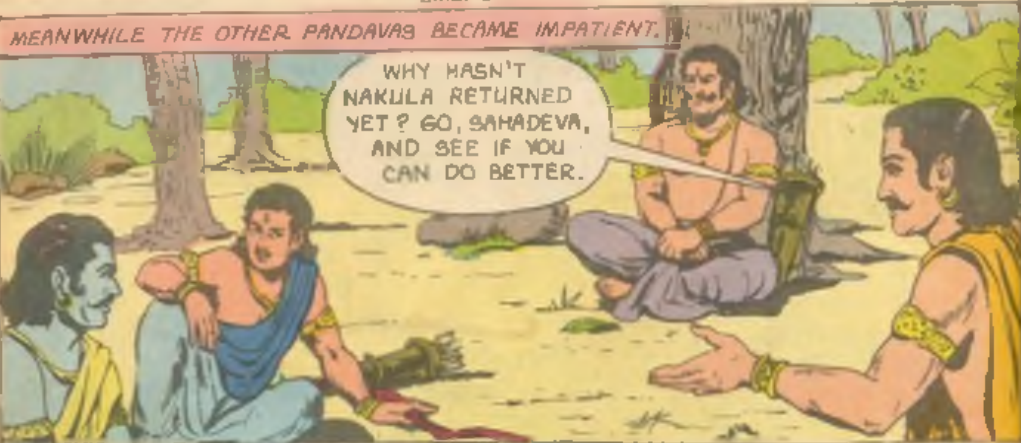


THE NEXT MOMENT HE FELL DEAD.



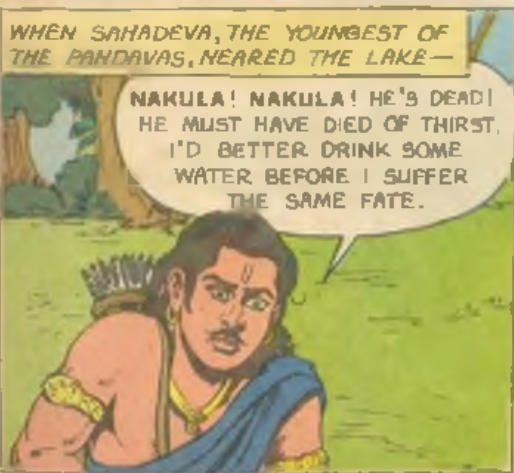
MEANWHILE THE OTHER PANDAVAS BECAME IMPATIENT.

WHY HASN'T NAKULA RETURNED YET? GO, SAHADEVA, AND SEE IF YOU CAN DO BETTER.



WHEN SAHADEVA, THE YOUNGEST OF THE PANDAVAS, NEARED THE LAKE—

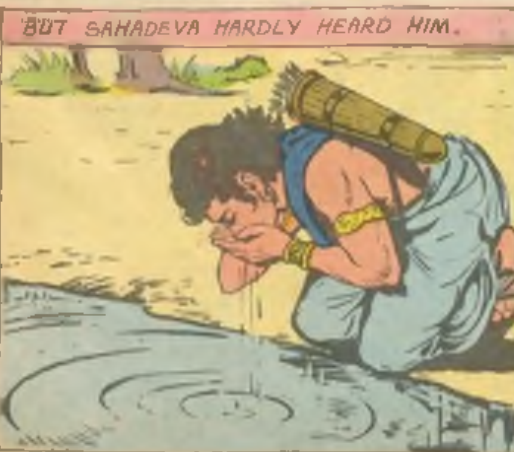
NAKULA! NAKULA! HE'S DEAD! HE MUST HAVE DIED OF THIRST. I'D BETTER DRINK SOME WATER BEFORE I SUFFER THE SAME FATE.



I OWN THIS LAKE. IF YOU DRINK WITHOUT FIRST ANSWERING MY QUESTIONS, YOU TOO WILL FALL DEAD.



BUT SAHADEVA HARDLY HEARD HIM.



AND HE TOO FELL DEAD.



WHEN CAME ARJUNA, THE THIRD OF THE PANDAVAS. HE CAME IN SEARCH OF HIS BROTHERS.

NAKULA! SAHADEVA!
HOW...WHO HAS DONE
THIS VILE DEED? WHOEVER
IT IS, HE HAS INVITED
HIS OWN DEATH.



ARJUNA RAISED HIS BOW AND LOOKED AROUND.

THERE IS
NO ONE IN SIGHT.
BEFORE I GO IN
SEARCH OF THE
MURDERER, I'D
BETTER QUENCH
MY THIRST.



WHEN HE WAS ABOUT TO DRINK THE COOL WATER...

NO, ARJUNA, DON'T!
NOT IF YOU WANT TO
LIVE. YOU WILL FIRST
ANSWER MY QUESTIONS.



ARJUNA WAS ENRAGED.

WILL I ? O COWARD,
APPEAR BEFORE ME,
IF YOU DARE, AND
THEN LAY YOUR
CONDITIONS.



WHEN HIS TAUNT DID NOT SEEM TO HAVE
ANY EFFECT, ARJUNA RAISED HIS BOW AND
SHOT IN THE DIRECTION OF THE VOICE.



YOUR ARROWS CANNOT
HARM ME, ARJUNA!
WHY DON'T YOU
ANSWER MY
QUESTIONS?



I WILL! WITH MORE
EFFECTIVE WEAPONS. BUT
NOT BEFORE I DRINK SOME
WATER FROM THIS LAKE.



ARJUNA TOO DISREGARDED THE WARNING



...AND PAID THE PENALTY.



THEN CAME BHIMA, THE SECOND PANDAVA. WHEN HE SAW HIS BROTHERS LYING DEAD NEAR THE LAKE--



THIS MUST BE THE ACT OF A YAKSHA* OR A RAKSHASA* A BATTLE AWAITS ME. LET ME QUENCH MY THIRST AND PREPARE MYSELF FOR IT.

BHIMA TOO DRANK THE WATER DISREGARDING THE WARNING OF THE INVISIBLE ONE, AND FELL DEAD.

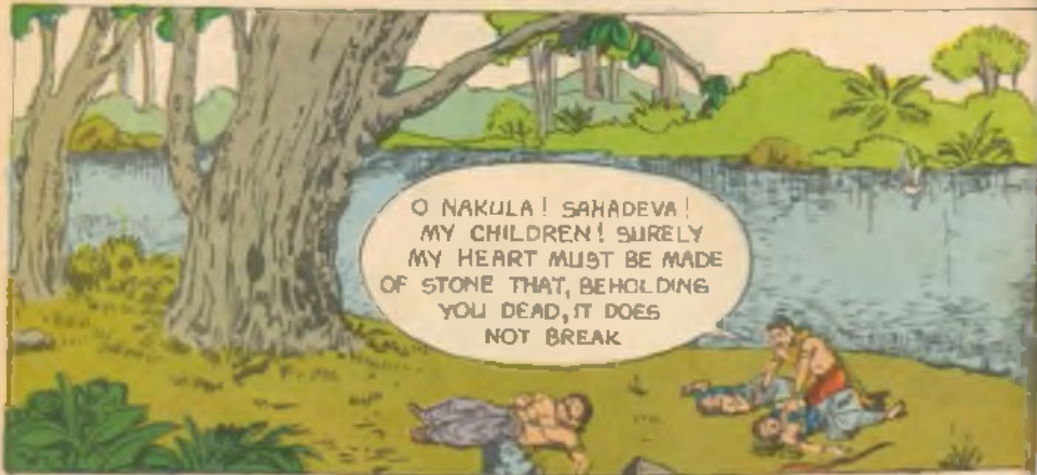
AT LAST YUDHISHTHIRA HIMSELF CAME. HE WAS STUNNED BY THE SIGHT THAT MET HIS EYES.



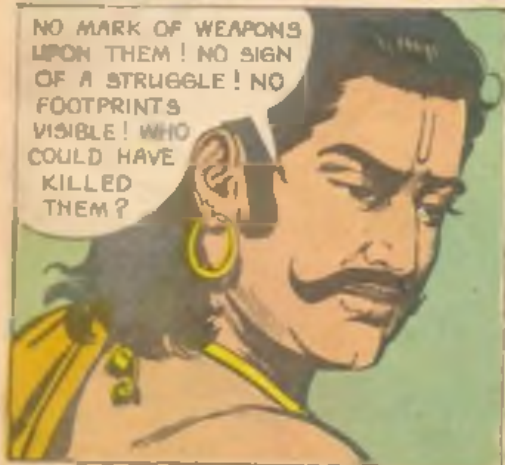
DEAR, DEAR, BROTHERS! ARE YOU REALLY DEAD OR ARE MY EYES PLAYING TRICKS ON ME!



O INVINCIBLE ARJUNA,
O MIGHTY BHIMA, THERE
WAS NONE TO EQUAL YOU
IN STRENGTH AND VALOUR!
WHO COULD HAVE
KILLED YOU?



O NAKULA! SAHADEVA!
MY CHILDREN! SURELY
MY HEART MUST BE MADE
OF STONE THAT, BEHOLDING
YOU DEAD, IT DOES
NOT BREAK.



NO MARK OF WEAPONS
UPON THEM! NO SIGN
OF A STRUGGLE! NO
FOOTPRINTS
VISIBLE! WHO
COULD HAVE
KILLED THEM?



AS YUDHISHTHIRA
WAS ABOUT TO
DRINK...

A VOICE STOPPED HIM.

I AM THE CRANE WHO OWNS THIS LAKE. IF YOU DRINK WITHOUT FIRST ANSWERING MY QUESTIONS YOU, TOO, WILL DIE LIKE YOUR RASH BROTHERS.

YOU, WHO HAVE KILLED THOSE WHO COULD NOT BE OVERCOME EITHER BY THE DEVAS OR THE ASURAS, CANNOT BE AN ORDINARY BIRD. TELL ME WHO YOU REALLY ARE.

THE NEXT MOMENT —

I AM A YAKSHA. IF YOU ANSWER MY QUESTIONS, YOU MAY DRINK AT MY LAKE.

O YAKSHA, ASK YOUR QUESTIONS. I SHALL TRY TO ANSWER THEM.



THEN HERE IS THE FIRST ONE. WHAT MAKES ONE A BRAHMAN — BIRTH, CONDUCT OR LEARNING?

IT IS BEHAVIOUR THAT MAKES ONE A BRAHMAN.

WHAT IS IT THAT CAUSES CEASELESS WONDER?

DAY AFTER DAY, COUNTLESS PEOPLE DIE. YET, THE LIVING WISH TO LIVE FOREVER. WHAT COULD BE MORE EXTRAORDINARY?

HOW DO YOU BECOME RICH? HOW DO YOU BECOME HAPPY?

IF YOU ABANDON LUST, YOU WILL BE RICH. IF YOU ABANDON DESIRE, YOU WILL BE HAPPY.

AT LAST —

YOUR ANSWERS PLEASE ME. ONE OF YOUR BROTHERS CAN NOW COME BACK TO LIFE. WHICH ONE DO YOU WANT?

NAKULA, MY LORD.

THE YAKSHA WAS SURPRISED.

WHY NAKULA? WHY NOT MIGHTY BHIMA OR VALIANT ARJUNA? ONE OF THEM WOULD BE MORE USEFUL TO YOU WHEN YOU TRY TO REGAIN YOUR KINGDOM!

BESIDES, BHIMA AND ARJUNA ARE YOUR OWN BROTHERS. NAKULA IS ONLY YOUR STEP-BROTHER. WHY DO YOU CHOOSE HIM?

MY FATHER HAD TWO WIVES — KUNTI AND MADRI. I, A SON OF KUNTI, AM ALIVE. LET A SON OF MADRI TOO LIVE. LORD, LET NAKULA COME TO LIFE.



I AM PLEASSED WITH YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. ALL YOUR BROTHERS SHALL COME TO LIFE.



AND LO! THEY DID!

MY LORD, YOU CANNOT BE A YAKSHA. YOU MUST BE A DEVA. PLEASE REVEAL YOURSELF.



THE NEXT MOMENT THE YAKSHA VANISHED AND IN HIS PLACE STOOD YAMA, THE LORD OF DEATH, BY WHOSE GRACE YUDHISHTHIRA HAD BEEN BORN TO KUNTI.

I AM YAMA. I WANTED TO TEST YOU. SO, IN THE FORM OF A DEER, I TOOK AWAY THE BRAHMAN'S STICKS TO DRAW YOU TO THIS SPOT.



YAMA THEN GAVE YUDHISHTHIRA THE STICKS.

YOU WILL COMPLETE THE REMAINING YEAR OF YOUR EXILE SUCCESSFULLY. YOU MAY NOW ASK FOR ANOTHER BOON.



LORD, MAY I NEVER
SUCCEED TO LUST,
AVARICE AND ANGER.
MAY I EVER BE
DEVOTED TO VIRTUE
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.



MY CHILD,
YOU WILL EVER
BE WHAT YOU ARE,
THE EMBODIMENT
OF DHARMA.



AND YAMA VANISHED. THE PANDAVAS RETURNED
THE STICKS TO THE BRAHMAN.

I SHALL BE EVER GRATEFUL
TO YOU, O YUDHISHTHIRA!

THE LAST COMPANION



WHEN THE THIRTEEN YEARS OF EXILE WERE OVER, YUDHISHTHIRA TRIED FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT WITH THE KAURAVAS. BUT DURYODHANA REPLIED WITH A CRY FOR WAR. MANY WERE THE BRAVE WARRIORS THAT WERE SLAIN ON EITHER SIDE, BEFORE THE PANDAVAS FINALLY WON THE WAR.

IN SPITE OF THE VICTORY, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS SAD.



THE KINGDOM IS OURS, BUT AT WHAT COST! ALMOST ALL OUR DEAR KINSMEN ARE SLAIN. I SHALL RENOUNCE THE WORLD AND BECOME AN ASCETIC.

THE COURT ELDERS, HOWEVER, PERSUADED YUDHISHTHIRA THAT HE HAD ONLY FULFILLED HIS DUTY. SO HE FINALLY AGREED TO ASCEND THE THRONE. NEEDLESS TO SAY, HE MADE A PERFECT KING.



OUR KING IS JUST, GENEROUS AND COMPASSIONATE.

MAY GOD BLESS HIM!

SEVERAL YEARS WENT BY. THEN ONE DAY, SAGE NARADA CALLED ON YUDHISHTHIRA —

HOLY ONE, IN THE COURSE OF YOUR WANDERINGS IN THE FOREST, DID YOU COME ACROSS MY MOTHER, KUNTI, AND MY UNCLE AND HIS WIFE ?

I DID, O KING, I HAVE BAD NEWS FOR YOU. THEY DIED IN A FOREST FIRE.



YUDHISHTHIRA HAD HARDLY RECOVERED FROM HIS GRIEF WHEN A MESSENGER ARRIVED FROM DWARAKA.

MY LORD, THE YADAVAS ARE ALL DEAD ! THEY KILLED ONE ANOTHER IN A DRUNKEN BRAWL ! AND LORD KRISHNA, TOO, HAS LEFT THIS WORLD.

KRISHNA GONE !

NO !



I FEEL THE TIME HAS COME FOR US TO LEAVE THIS EARTH AND SEEK HEAVEN.

WE FEEL THE SAME.



SO YUDHISHTHIRA INSTALLED
PAREEKSHIT, THE
SON OF ABHIMANYU
ON THE THRONE...



...AND LED DRAUPADI AND HIS BROTHERS OUT OF HASTINAPURA. AS THE CITIZENS
STOOD OUTSIDE THE CITY, WATCHING THEIR BELOVED KING AND THE BRAVE
PANDAVAS DEPART, A STRAY DOG APPEARED ON THE SCENE.



IT FOLLOWED THE LITTLE GROUP
ON THEIR TREK TO HEAVEN.



HAVING CROSSED MOUNT HIMAVAT, THEY
WALKED THROUGH THE GREAT DESERT
BEYOND IT...



...TILL THEY REACHED THE FOOT OF MOUNT MERU.



THEY BEGAN TO CLIMB THE MOUNTAIN. THEIR AIM WAS TO ENTER HEAVEN IN THEIR HUMAN FORM—AN AIM ONLY PERFECT BEINGS COULD ASPIRE TO.



SUDDENLY —



BHIMA WAS SHOCKED.



O KING, WHY HAS DRAUPADI, THE SINLESS, FALLEN?

YUDHISHTHIRA ANSWERED WITHOUT TURNING BACK.

SHE WAS PARTIAL TO ARJUNA.



SAHADEVA WAS THE NEXT TO FALL.

HE LACKED HUMILITY.



WHEN NAKULA FOLLOWED SAHADEVA



HE WAS TOO PROUD OF HIS HANDSOME FEATURES.

AS YUDHISHTHIRA PROCEEDED, FOLLOWED BY BHIMA AND ARJUNA, THE LITTLE DOG CONTINUED TO KEEP THEM COMPANY.



AFTER THEY HAD COVERED SOME DISTANCE—

ARJUNA!

HIS VALOUR MADE HIM VAIN.



SUDDENLY BHIMA CRIED OUT...

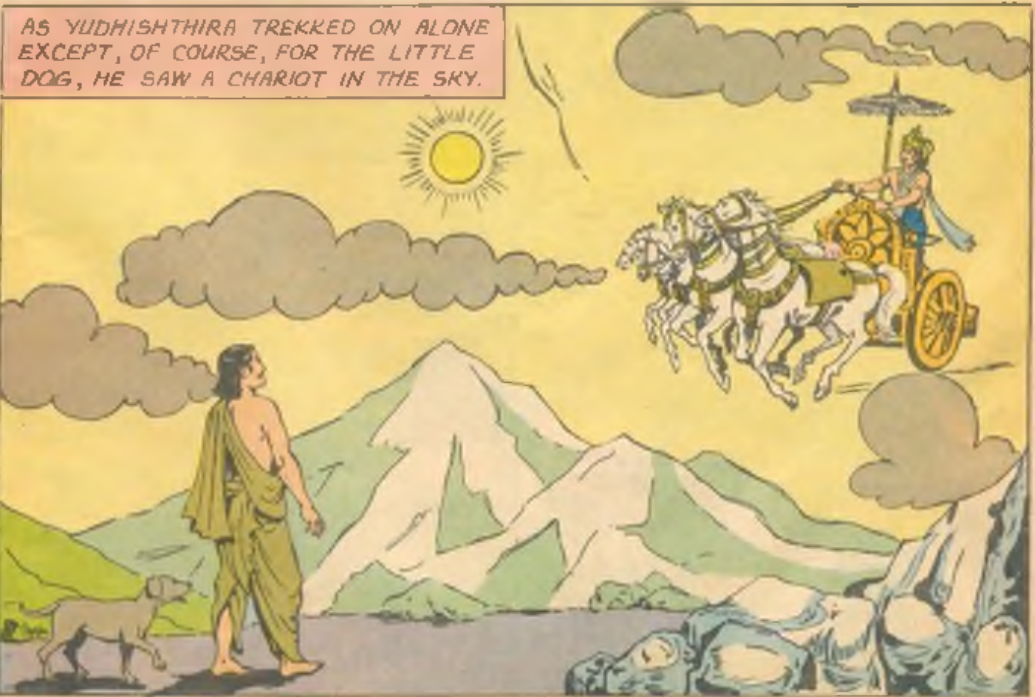
WAIT! I, YOUR DARLING, AM FALLING. WHERE DID I FAIL?



YOU WERE GREEDY, YOU ATE IMMODERATELY.



AS YUDHISHTHIRA TREKKED ON ALONE EXCEPT, OF COURSE, FOR THE LITTLE DOG, HE SAW A CHARIOT IN THE SKY.



THE NEXT MOMENT INDRA, THE LORD OF HEAVEN, STOOD BEFORE HIM.



COME, YUDHISHTHIRA,
I'LL TAKE YOU TO
HEAVEN. ASCEND
THIS CHARIOT.

I DO NOT WISH
TO GO TO HEAVEN
WITHOUT MY BROTHERS
AND OUR WIFE.

INDRA SMILED.

THEY HAVE ALREADY
REACHED HEAVEN,
BUT NOT IN THEIR
HUMAN FORMS.
ASCEND THE
CHARIOT.

THIS DOG,
TOO, WILL GO
WITH ME.



NO! NO! THERE
IS NO PLACE IN
HEAVEN FOR
A DOG.

NO PLACE FOR
THIS FAITHFUL
DOG? THEN I TOO
HAVE NO PLACE
THERE.

WILL YOU LOSE
HEAVEN FOR THE
SAKE OF AN
ANIMAL? FORSAKE
THE DOG.

I CANNOT ABANDON
HIM. HE HAS
FOLLOWED ME
DEVOTEDLY.





BUT YOU DID ABANDON YOUR BROTHERS AND DRAUPADI.

THEY WERE DEAD.

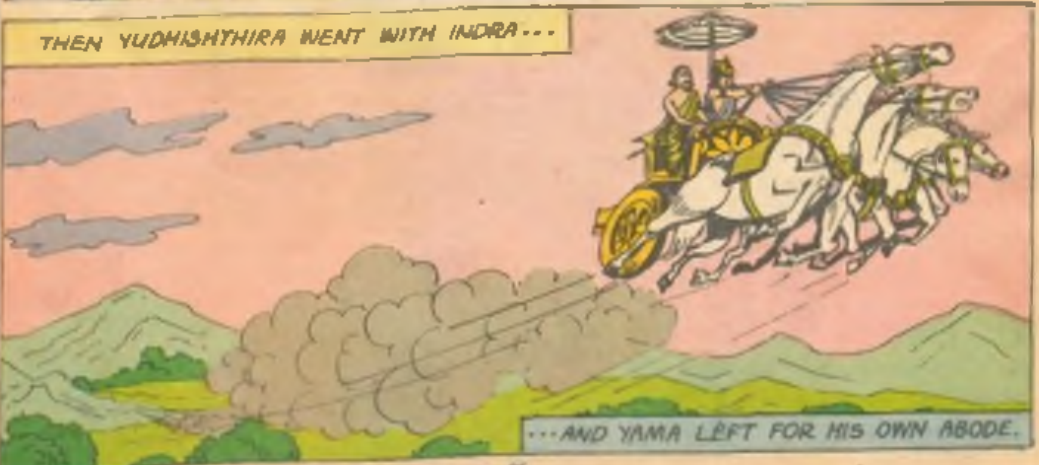


THIS LITTLE DOG IS ALIVE. HE HAS KEPT ME COMPANY. HE DEPENDS ON ME. I WON'T ABANDON HIM.



SUDDENLY—

IT WAS I, YAMA, WHO FOLLOWED YOU IN THE FORM OF A DOG. O SON, YOU HAVE COMPASSION FOR ALL CREATURES. THAT IS WHY YOU AND YOU ALONE MAY ENTER HEAVEN IN YOUR HUMAN FORM.



THEN YUDHISHTHIRA WENT WITH INDRA...

...AND YAMA LEFT FOR HIS OWN ABODE.

THE FINAL TEST



WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA ENTERED HEAVEN, HE WAS RECEIVED BY THE GODS AND THE SAGES. HE WAS SURPRISED TO SEE DURYODHANA THERE.

THIS IS OUTRAGEOUS!
DURYODHANA, HERE!
DURYODHANA, WHO WAS
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
WAR— FOR THE
DESTRUCTION OF MEN
AND MORALITY!! I WILL
NOT STAY HERE.



NARADA STEPPED FORWARD AND TRIED TO PACIFY HIM.

THIS IS HEAVEN. THERE
CAN BE NO ILL-WILL
HERE. DURYODHANA'S
HEROIC DEATH ON
THE BATTLEFIELD
HAS WON HIM A
PLACE IN HEAVEN.



IF HEAVEN IS THE REWARD FOR THE UNRIGHTEOUS DURYODHANA, I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT HIGHER WORLD HAS BEEN ATTAINED BY MY RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS!



HE LOOKED AROUND.

WHERE ARE MY BROTHERS? AND DRAUPADI? WHERE IS KARNA? TAKE ME TO MY BROTHERS.



INDRA TURNED TO YUDHISHTHIRA.

NO ONE CAN FORCE YOU TO STAY HERE IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.



HE CALLED A MESSENGER.

TAKE THE RIGHTEOUS YUDHISHTHIRA TO HIS FRIENDS AND RELATIVES.



YUDHISHTHIRA FOLLOWED THE CELESTIAL MESSENGER. AS THEY WALKED ON, THE GENTLE GLOW OF HEAVEN GRADUALLY FADED...



...AND THEY WERE ENVELOPED IN BLINDING DARKNESS.



WITH EACH STEP THEY TOOK, THE MORE REVOLTING BECAME THE SCENES THAT MET THEIR EYES.



AS THEY WENT ON, A FOUL STENCH ALMOST SUFFOCATED YUDHISHTHIRA.

WHERE ARE WE? WHERE ARE MY BROTHERS? WHEN WILL WE LEAVE BEHIND THIS UNPLEASANT PATH AND MEET THEM?



THE CELESTIAL MESSENGER STOPPED.

I WAS TOLD TO LEAD YOU THIS FAR AND STOP.

IF YOU HAVE HAD ENOUGH, YOU MAY RETURN WITH ME.

DISGUSTED BY THE FOUL SMELL, YUDHISHTHIRA BEGAN TO RETRACE HIS STEPS. SUDDENLY—

WAIT! DON'T LEAVE US!

YOUR PURE PRESENCE BRINGS US COMFORT.

AS LONG AS YOU ARE HERE, WE DO NOT FEEL THE TORTURES INFLICTED UPON US.

PLEASE DO NOT GO BACK.

WHO ARE YOU?

I'M BHIMA.

I'M KARNA.

I'M NAKULA.

I'M ARJUNA.

I'M SAHADEVA.

I'M DRALIPADI.

YUDHISHTHIRA WAS BEWILDERED.

AM I ASLEEP OR AWAKE? OR HAVE I GONE MAD?

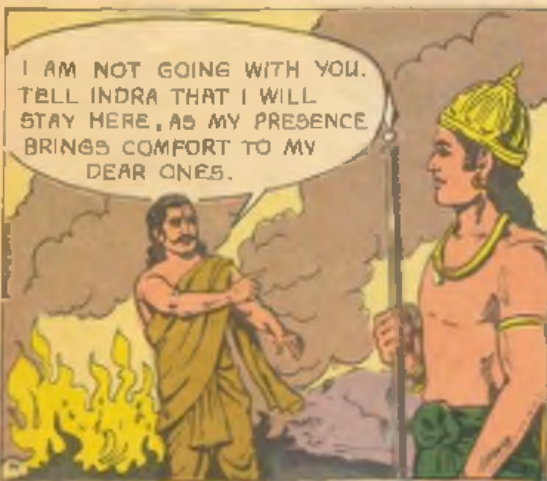


THEN HE BECAME ANGRY.

DURYODHANA IN HEAVEN! AND MY BROTHERS IN HELL! ARE THE GODS BLIND? IS DHARMA DEAD?



I AM NOT GOING WITH YOU. TELL INDRA THAT I WILL STAY HERE, AS MY PRESENCE BRINGS COMFORT TO MY DEAR ONES.



THE NEXT MOMENT, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS BATHED IN DIVINE LIGHT.



INDRA AND OTHER DEITIES APPEARED BEFORE HIM.

MY CHILD, FOR THE ONE LIE YOU SPOKE TO HASTEN DRONA'S END, YOU WERE EXPOSED TO HELL FOR A SECOND. YOUR BROTHERS HAD TO SUFFER HELL FOR A SHORT DURATION, FOR THE FAULTS YOU YOURSELF WERE AWARE OF. THEY ARE NOW IN HEAVEN.



THOSE WHOSE MERITS FAR EXCEED THEIR SINS, EXPERIENCE HELL FIRST FOR A SHORT WHILE AND THEN GO TO HEAVEN.



THEN YAMA ADDRESSED YUDHISHTHIRA.

CHILD, THIS WAS YOUR THIRD TEST. YOU WOULD RATHER STAY IN HELL FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR BROTHERS. YOU ARE COMPASSIONATE, RIGHTEOUS AND SINLESS.



YUDHISHTHIRA BOWED TO YAMA.

FATHER, IT WAS YOU WHO GAVE ME STRENGTH TO TREAD THE RIGHTEOUS PATH. I BOW TO YOU.



HE THEN HAD A DIP IN THE CELESTIAL GANGA AND ASSUMED A DIVINE FORM.



HE WAS THEN ESCORTED BY INDRA AND YAMA TO HEAVEN, WHERE HE WAS REUNITED WITH HIS BROTHERS.

