

*Great Heroes  
of the  
Mahabharat*



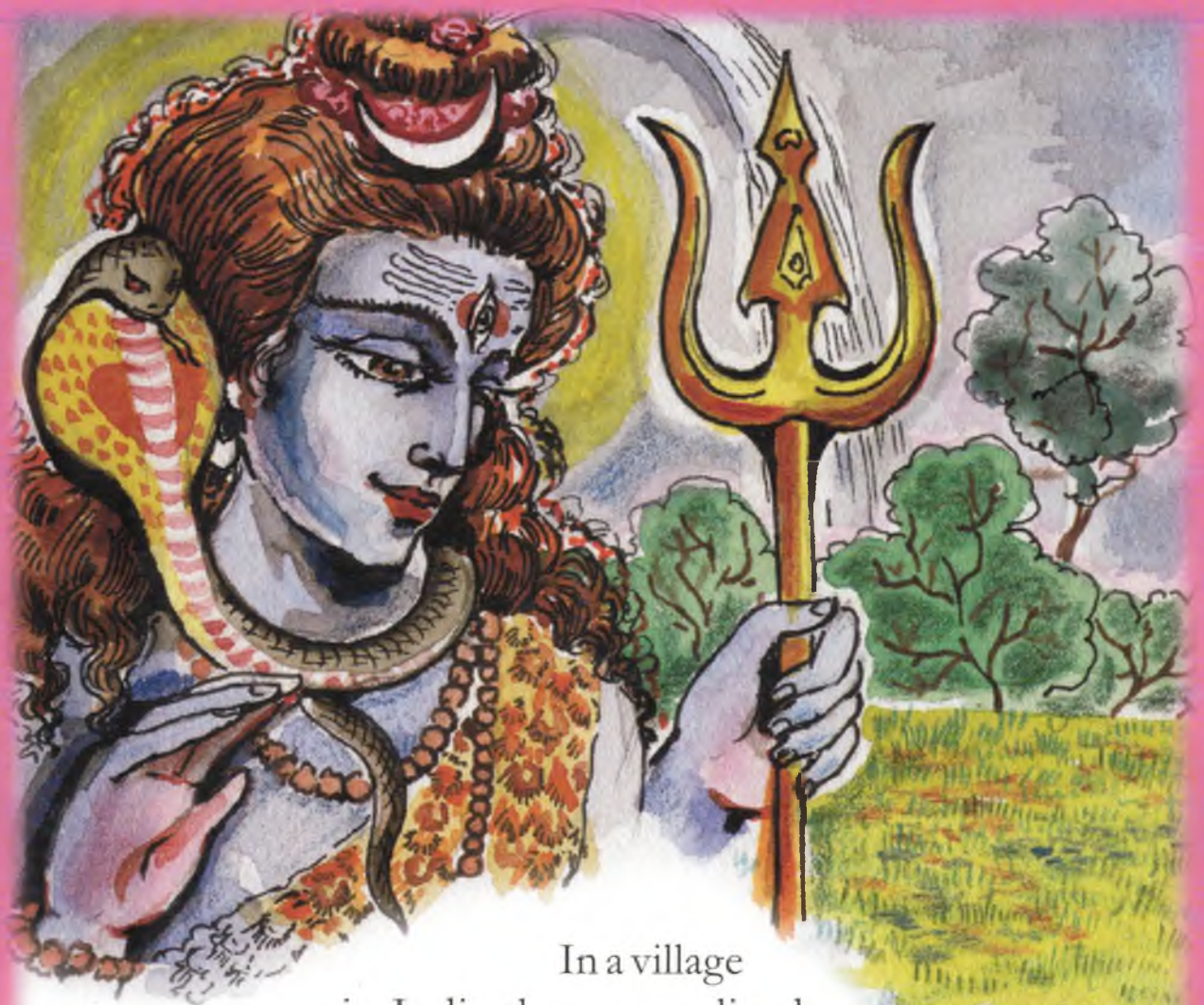
*Kunti & Draupadi*

Great Heroes of the Mahabharat

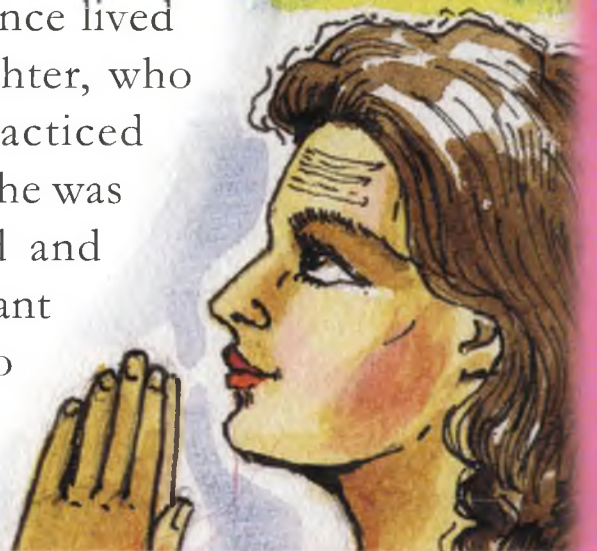


*Draupadi*

  
TOUCH STONE  
MEDIA



In a village in India there once lived a strong-willed brahmin's daughter, who prayed to Lord Shiva and practiced austerities to satisfy him. When he was pleased with her, he appeared and asked her what she wanted. "I want a good husband," she said. To emphasize her point she said it five times, and as a result Lord



Shiva gave her the boon to get five good husbands.

However the boon did not take effect in that lifetime but in her next life; she was born as Draupadi and she married



the five Pandavas (Yudhistir, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadev).

Draupadi's birth was as unusual as her married life. Her story

began many years before her birth when her father was living in gurukula.

Her father's name was Drupada and his best friend was Drona. As boys they were not interested in wealth. They were great friends simply because they liked each other. They were always together and they swore lasting friendship to each other.

Drupada promised Drona, "If ever you need help of any kind you must come to me, and I will help you."

But time went by and he forgot his promise. They grew up, left gurukula, and lived apart. Drona was a poor brahmin and Drupada a wealthy king.

Drona was very poor. He could tolerate hunger, but he hated to see his family suffer. One day his son came home from the village playground and asked his father about a drink the children had been talking about.

"What is this thing called milk?" he asked. "The children are saying that it is delicious. Can we try some father?"

Drona looked at his son, so small and thin.

"Yes, we can," he said, "but first I have to go and visit a friend."

Drona traveled to Panchal to see his old school friend. Until then, pride had kept him from going to beg from Drupada, but now he felt that he had no choice. He didn't want to go and therefore the reception he received from Drupada was unbearable.

"How can we be friends?" Drupada sneered. "Friendship is only possible between equals. Look at you! You are wearing old

rag. How dare you call yourself my friend?” Having forgotten his promise and their friendship, Drupada insulted Drona and threw him out of the kingdom.

Drona was furious. He had cherished his friendship with Drupada and was upset that Drupada insulted him. He planned to teach Drupada a lesson.

With revenge in mind, Drona visited Bhishmadev at the royal palace in Hastinapur. There he was received with warmth and respect, and he was employed as the martial arts teacher for the princes (the Pandavas and their cousins, the Kauravas). He was an excellent teacher and the princes learned well. Drona watched them grow and waited for the time when he would receive guru dakshina from them. He knew exactly what he wanted.

At last the princes became powerful warriors and Drona’s plan was ready to unfold.

“I want Drupada as guru dakshina,” Drona said. “Capture him and bring him to me.”

The princes loved their teacher and were willing to die to please him. They rode together to Panchal. Arjuna was the best fighter and was able to capture King Drupada. He bound him and brought him to Drona. At last Drona’s desire for revenge was fulfilled. He was an honest man and he wanted to do what was fair. He took half the kingdom and told Drupada that he forgave him for his previous harsh words. Drona had waited a long time and his anger had grown big in his heart, but once he had dealt with Drupada, he thought that the matter was closed. He was wrong; now Drupada was furious.

“Let me get a son to kill this Drona,” he raged. Even in his anger he remembered Arjuna’s skill in capturing him and said, “And let me get a daughter to marry that wonderful warrior, Arjuna.” Drupada went to the bank of the river Yamuna and prayed to two brahmins, Yaja and Upayaja, for help.

The brahmins agreed to help him. They performed a fire sacrifice and asked Drupada’s wife to eat the prasada, which would enable her to conceive powerful children. Instead of accepting the prasada immediately, she insisted on bathing first. The brahmins were angry at being kept waiting.

“Nothing that my brother and I do will ever go to waste,” Yaja said, and he threw the prasada into the fire. The flames of the fire blazed brightly and rose high into the air. Inside the tall flames the figure of a young man could be seen. He was Dhristadyumna. He stepped out of the fire and stood before them, shining with the radiance of a demigod. People swooned at the sight of the beautiful young man, his crown, his divine earrings, and his natural armor.

“This prince is born to kill Dronacarya,” called a voice from the sky. “He will bring peace and prosperity to the kingdom of Panchal and will take away the king’s fear and sorrow.” The assembly could hardly believe what had happened. The king barely had time to savor his happiness when another figure appeared from the fire. There stood Draupadi, a beautiful girl, with wonderful black eyes like lotus petals.

“This young woman is born to cause the destruction of the kshatriyas,” called the voice from the sky.



“She will bring peace and prosperity to the kingdom of Panchal. She will fulfill the desires of the demigods and bring disaster to the Kauravas.”

As soon as Drupada’s wife saw Dhristadyumna and Draupadi, she loved them as her own children. She said, “Let them know no other woman as their mother.”

“So be it,” said the brahmins and gave their blessings.



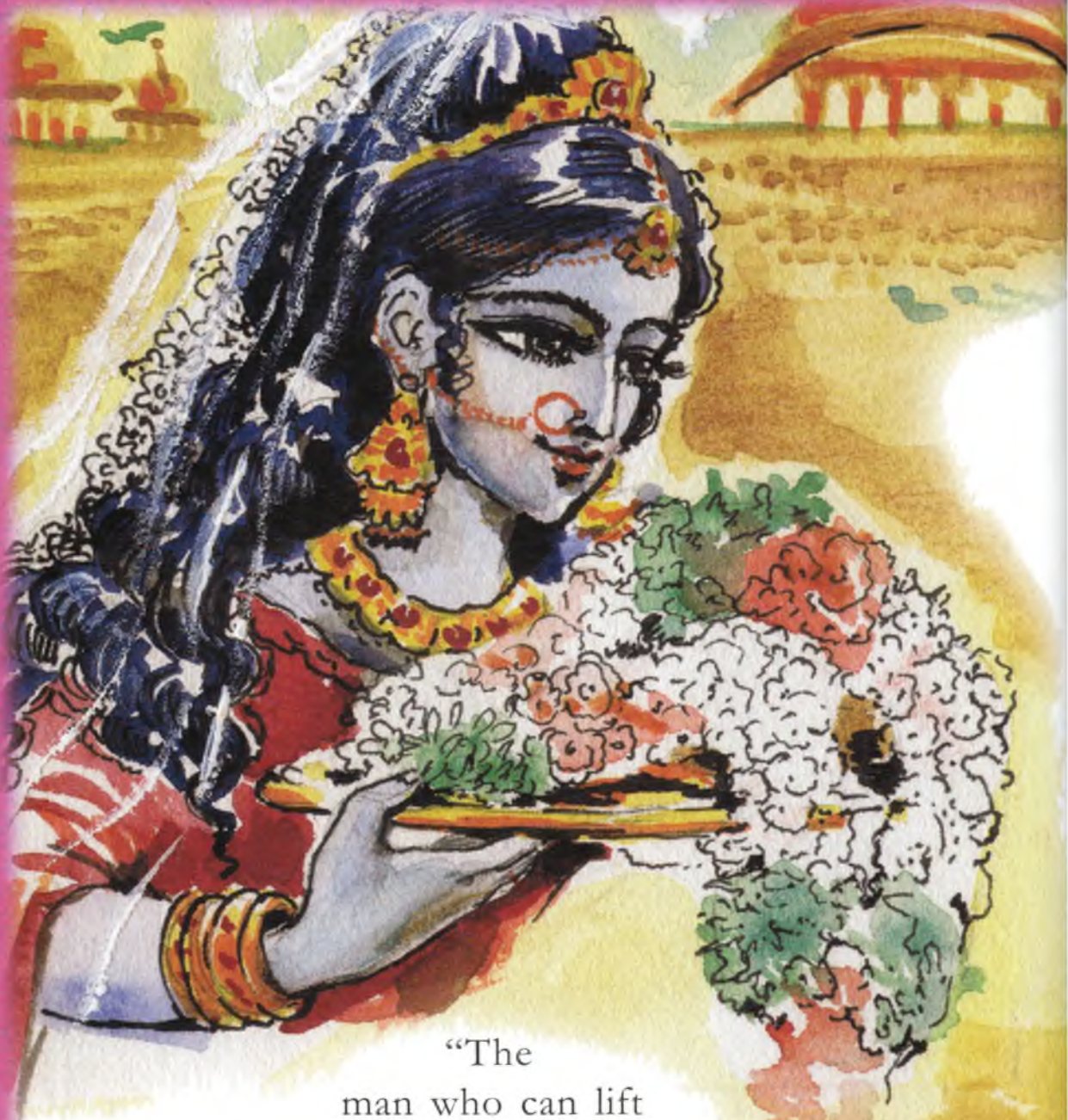
Everyone was delighted.

When the time came for Draupadi's marriage, her father arranged a contest. The task was difficult and it was designed so that only Arjuna could win. First, Drupada had a great bow made, a bow impossible for anyone but a great warrior to lift. Then, on the ceiling, he placed a golden fish covered by a revolving device with a hole in it. The man who wished to marry Draupadi had to use the bow to shoot an arrow through the hole in the revolving device and pierce the eye of the fish. And that wasn't all. The competitors were not allowed to look directly at the target. There was a bowl of water on the floor and they had to look at the reflection of the fish in the water.

Many princes and guests arrived, and soon the palace was flooded with spectators. Everyone was beautifully dressed and the marriage pandal was decorated with colorful cloth and sweet-smelling flowers. The atmosphere was just like that of the heavenly planets.

The contest had been designed so that Arjuna would win, but at that time, the Pandavas were hiding in forests or villages, assumed dead. People thought that they had been killed in a house fire. They came to the palace disguised as brahmins. Only Krishna, who was sitting in the audience, recognized them.

Draupadi was dressed in silk and decorated in jewels and flowers. She carried an exquisite garland to give to her husband. When she entered the pandal with her brother, the music and chanting of Vedic mantras stopped. Dhristadyumna made an announcement.



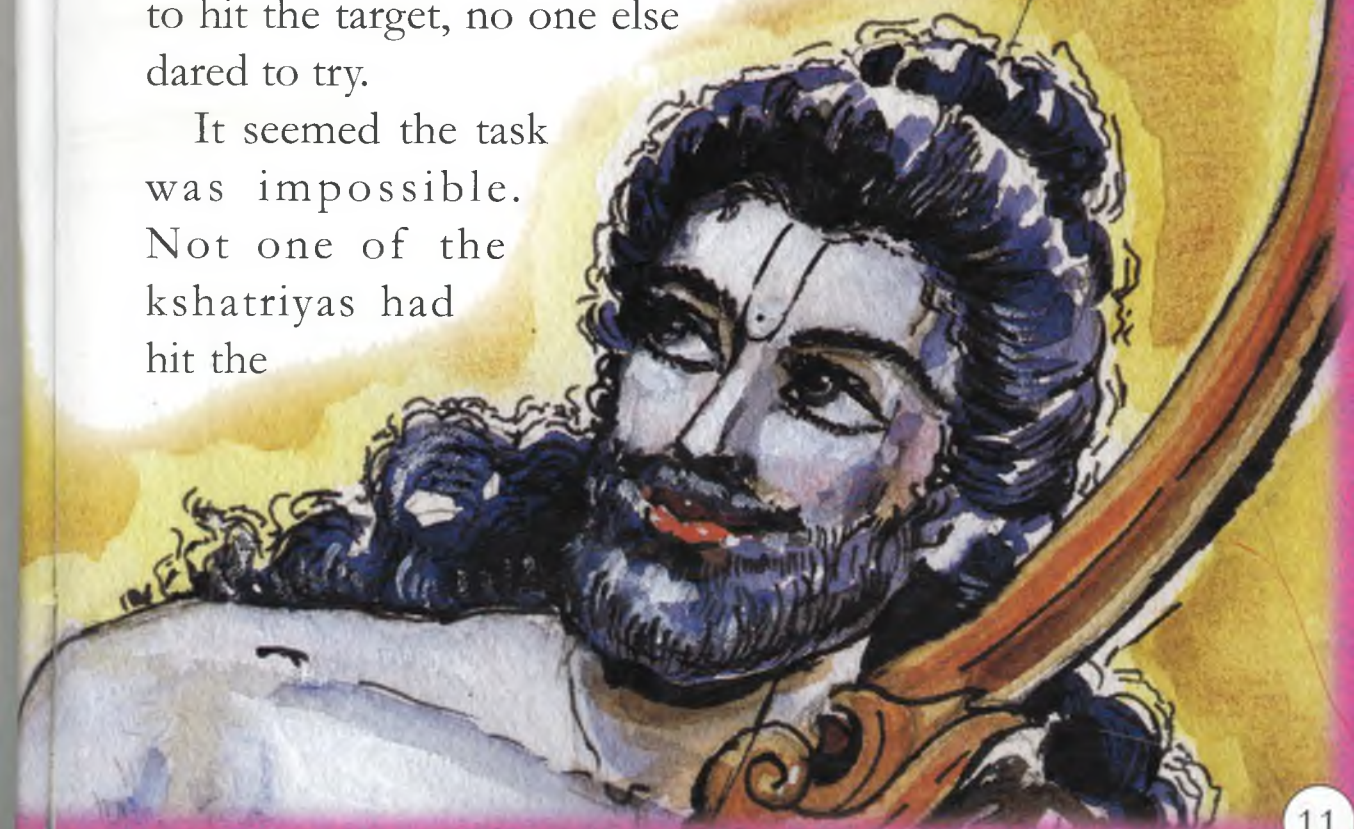
“The  
man who can lift  
the bow, string it, and shoot the target  
through the hole in the revolving device will  
win the hand of my sister.”

Many princes assembled at the stage, each

with hearts beating fast, each hoping to win Draupadi. The audience looked on eagerly as the contest began. The first to try could not lift the bow. Then those who were able to lift it were knocked down and rolled on the floor due to their effort. Some were pushed down by the force of the arrow flying from their hand. Most of them looked ridiculous as they lay spread-eagled on the floor.

When Karna stringed the bow and was about to shoot, Draupadi shouted, "I will not marry this charioteer," so he had to step down and was out of the contest. When the powerful Shishupal, Jarasanda, and Duryodhan failed to hit the target, no one else dared to try.

It seemed the task was impossible. Not one of the kshatriyas had hit the





target. As a formality the brahmins were invited to try. No one expected them to compete and the audience was surprised when Arjuna, looking like a young lion king, walked to the stage. He strung the bow with ease, looked into the bowl of water, and aimed at the target. The arrow flew like lightning straight into the eye of the fish.

There was a great cheer from the brahmins, a loud groan from the kshatriyas, and then silence as Draupadi walked up to the stage and garlanded Arjuna. He took Draupadi by the hand and



left the stage. Everything was going well, but Yudhishthira could feel anger mounting among the kshatriyas and he left the pandal. The disappointed princes attacked Arjuna and Bhima, who won the fight easily and hurried home to show Arjuna's surprise to their mother, Queen Kunti.

They stood at the door of the cottage where Queen Kunti was staying, and called out, "Mother, we have brought alms."

"Good," said Queen Kunti without looking, "Share it equally among all five of you." Kunti came out and saw Arjuna with Draupadi. "Oh no," she gasped, "What have I said? What have I done?"

But it was too late. Queen Kunti's words could not be taken back.

This was quite a dilemma, because a lady could not marry five brothers, but at the same time Queen Kunti's words could not be made false. Yudhishthira thought the solution was simple. He told Arjuna to marry Draupadi.

"You have won her. Make a holy fire and marry her."





“No,” said Arjuna, “How can I marry her? First you marry her, then Bhima, then I, then Nakula, and then Sahadev.”

Meanwhile, King Drupada sent his son to see what was happening. Dhristadyumna followed

the Pandavas and Draupadi to the cottage, and secretly he looked inside. Then he watched the Pandavas returning to the forest. He saw Draupadi eating only after she had distributed food to the brahmins, the guests, and the Pandavas. Dhristadyumna looked at his sister. She had been the darling of the palace. She had so many servants of her own, but now she was happily serving others.

After their meal, Sahadev prepared beds of kusha grass. The Pandavas lay heads facing the south, Kunti lay at their heads and Draupadi lay at their feet. Draupadi was used to a bed of fine silk, but now she lay content on a bed of grass. As they were preparing to fall asleep, the Pandavas held a lively discussion about weapons and wars.





“Aha!” thought Dhristadyumna. “These men are kshatriyas. They must be the Pandavas.” He returned home to report to his father. King Drupada sent for the Pandavas at once and arranged a feast to celebrate his daughter’s wedding, but on receiving them, he was shocked to hear that all five brothers planned to marry his daughter.

“You are known as Dharma, the personification of religion. How can you suggest such an immoral thing?” he asked Yudhistir.

“Your Majesty, the laws of dharma are very deep and the

details are hard to understand,” said Yudhistir. “My mother has never spoken a lie and she has ordered us to marry your daughter. It must be so.”

Drupada met with the great sage Vyasadev and heard how Lord Shiva had blessed Draupadi.

“When Lord Shiva makes a command what can I say?” Drupada said. “Let all five marriages take place with grand festivities.”

The day was auspicious so Yudhistir married Draupadi and on the following four days she married the other Pandavas.

News of the marriages traveled and quickly reached the Kauravas. Duryodhan (the chief of the Kauravas) was frantic. The Pandavas were alive, alive and increasing in power, again threatening the position of the Kauravas. Something had to be done to prevent them taking the throne. At once, Vidura (the uncle of the Pandavas and Kauravas) was sent to Panchal to bring the Pandavas back to Hastinapur.

When they returned they were offered half the kingdom. Although the land offered was of poor quality—forest and desert land unfit for habitation—they accepted it.

They settled on their new land, known as Indraprasta, and with the help of Lord Krishna and Vyasadev, the land flourished. It was filled with everything the people needed, such as fruits, flowers, grains, and vegetables. There were beautiful parks and gardens.

Narada Muni visited the Pandavas in their new city and gave instructions on how they should live. He told them that each of





the Pandavas should take it in turn to live with Draupadi for one year. If a brother disturbed another brother while he was alone with Draupadi, he should go into exile for one year. The system worked well and each year for five years a son was born to Draupadi.

The citizens were happy because they felt peaceful and protected. There were few problems, but in emergencies, anyone could get help from the Pandavas.

One day a brahmin came to Arjuna because a band of thieves had come onto his land and stolen his cows. Arjuna knew that

if he took his weapons, which were in the room where Yudhistir was alone with Draupadi, he would have to go into exile. Not caring about himself or his own future he decided to help the brahmin. He apologized for interrupting, got his weapons, retrieved the stolen cows, and went into exile. At the end of the year, Arjuna married Subhadra (Lord Krishna's sister) and brought her back to the palace.

Draupadi was angry with Arjuna. She hadn't seen him for a year and there he was with a beautiful new wife.

"Now you have forgotten about me and found a new wife," she said and turned away.

Arjuna called to Draupadi, "Subhadra will be your faithful servant."

At once Subhadra rushed forward and touched Draupadi's feet. Draupadi's heart melted and she embraced Subhadra with love. Draupadi was a woman, but she was also a warrior and, typical of that class, she was strong and bold—sometimes as angry as fire—but mostly kind and compassionate.

One day Lord Krishna was visiting the palace. He cut His finger and it bled badly. Draupadi immediately tore a strip of cloth from the beautiful silk sari she was wearing and gave it to Krishna to bind His wound.

Krishna smiled at her and said, "One day I will repay you for this cloth."

The opulence of the Pandavas grew and grew. Their land became more beautiful and rich in nature's gifts. This was unbearable to the Kauravas. Duryodhan plotted with Shakuni



and Duhshasan. They sent Yudhistir an invitation to play dice—a game he could never win. They smiled at each other, delighted at their own cleverness. This, they considered, was one of their best plans. A warrior could not refuse an offer to gamble so Yudhistir reluctantly agreed to play.

The result was a disaster for the Pandavas. Yudhistir lost his kingdom, his wealth, and even his brothers. Shakuni was a masterful cheat!

Then Yudhistir bet and lost himself. It seemed that there



was nothing left to gamble. But Shakuni urged him to bet Draupadi and she too was lost. Duryodhan sent for her. Draupadi would not go to the court. She insisted on knowing if she had been lost after Yudhistir had lost himself. How could someone who had lost himself bet on someone they had no right to own?

She was too

clever and Duryodhan could not tolerate it. He sent Duhshasan to get her. Duhshasan went to her quarters, and grabbing her by the hair, dragged her to the court.

“Shame on you all!” she cried. “Why are all the noble people sitting quiet, doing nothing, watching but doing nothing. Why?” She cried in fury and frustration. “Look, even Vidura is quiet.”

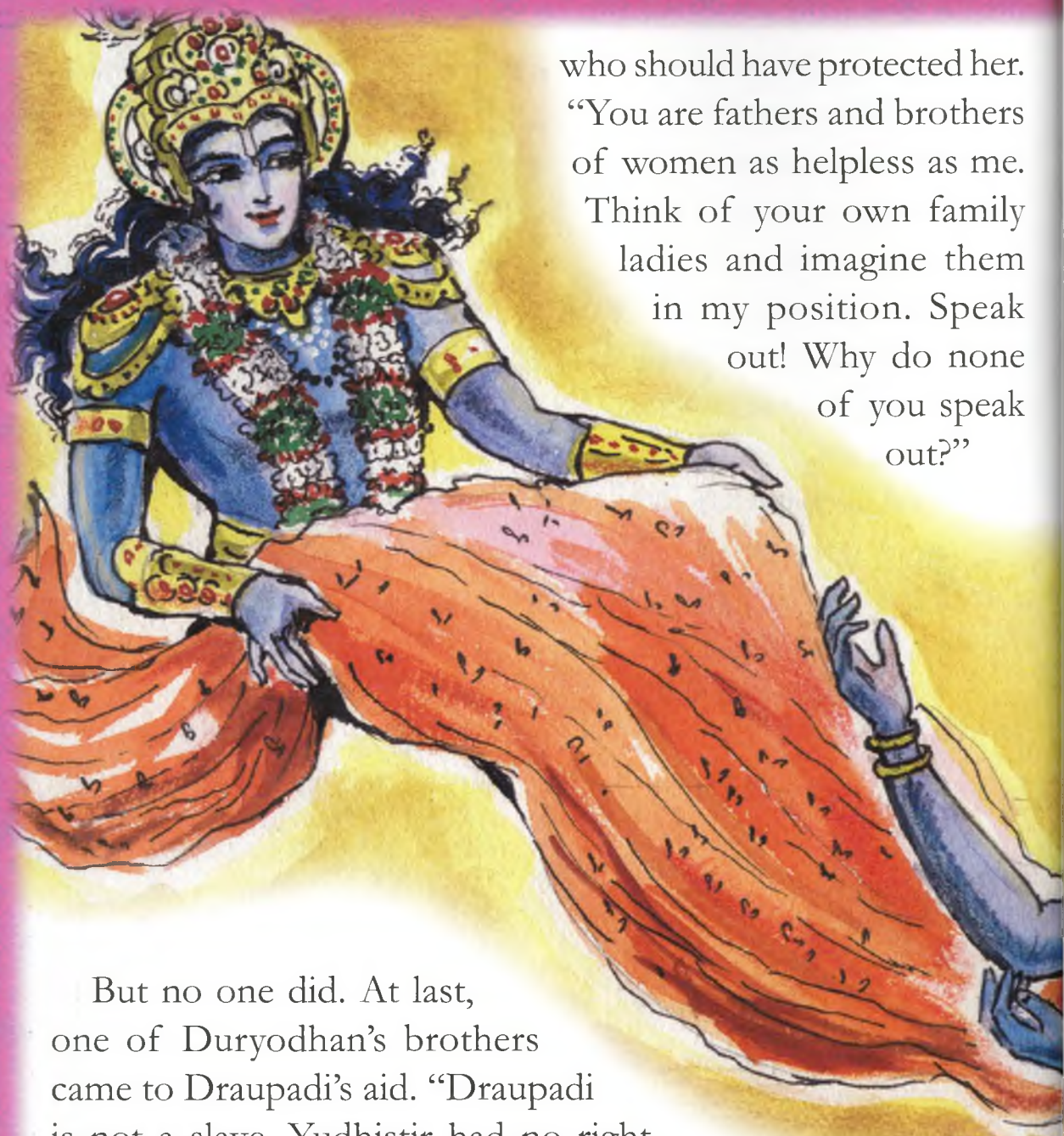
“You have no rights, slave girl,” yelled Duhshasan and tugged again at her hair.

The greatly powerful Grandfather Bhishma spoke next.

“Yudhistir admits that he had lost himself before he bet you,” he said. “But he will not say that Shakuni is a cheat. I don’t know what madness is happening here.”

“There is no fault in my husband,” said Draupadi. “He was forced to play with the cheat Shakuni.” She turned to the men





who should have protected her. “You are fathers and brothers of women as helpless as me. Think of your own family ladies and imagine them in my position. Speak out! Why do none of you speak out?”

But no one did. At last, one of Duryodhan’s brothers came to Draupadi’s aid. “Draupadi is not a slave. Yudhistir had no right to bet her,” said Vikarna. “This heinous act was performed on the ill advice of Shakuni and is not within the laws of dharma.”

“We don’t have to listen to this boy,” shouted Karna.

“Disrobe her and the Pandavas. They are our slaves.”

Hearing Karna’s words, the Pandavas removed their outer garments.



Duhshasan grabbed Draupadi’s sari and pulled. No one helped. She struggled and clung to her sari with all her strength. Utterly alone in that huge assembly of warriors, she fought bitterly to keep her dignity. She was exasperated. None of her husbands came to her aid throughout the barbaric attack.

“Krishna!” she cried and threw up her arms in complete surrender. “Krishna, Krishna!”



At once, Krishna, the master of all mystic power, appeared. Unseen, He supplied an unlimited length of sari to Draupadi. Soon there was a mountain of cloth on the floor and Duhshasan had no more strength to pull—exhausted, he admitted defeat.

Bhima couldn't control his rage. He spoke with such fury that the whole court trembled. "In the coming war I will rip open Duhsahsan's heart and drink his blood."

Finally, understanding that there would be terrible repercussions, Duryodhan's father, King Dhritarastra, reprimanded his son and granted the Pandavas freedom to return to Indraprasta.

There was no end to Duryodhan's envy and malice. When the Pandavas had returned home, he called Yudhistir to play dice again. This time, as a result of losing to the cheat Shakuni, the Pandavas were banished for thirteen years, the last year was to be spent incognito.

The Pandavas went to the forest accompanied by so many brahmins that it was impossible to feed them all. Yudhistir asked them to go back, but they refused because they were determined to stay with the pious Pandavas, even if it meant starving. Yudhistir asked the family priest what to do and was advised to worship Suryadev, the sun-god. Suryadev was pleased and gave Draupadi a magic pot.

"Draupadi, this pot will feed as many people as you care to serve," Surya said. He explained that the pot would contain food until she had eaten. Then the pot would be empty until she cooked again.

With that problem solved, the Pandavas accepted the challenges



of forest life and were able to tolerate all the difficulties that came their way.

The Pandavas were peaceful with their lot, but Duryodhan and his followers were never peaceful. With his cousins out of sight, Duryodhan could have forgotten his envy and enjoyed the kingdom, but his malice ruined any chance of inner peace. His mind was bent on destroying the Pandavas, and he never stopped thinking of ways to kill them.

One day he entertained Durvasa Muni and his thousands of followers. Durvasa Muni was very pleased with Duryodhan's hospitality and offered him a boon. Cunning as ever, Duryodhan said, "My dear Muni, please visit my noble cousins, who are living in the forest. I only desire that you make them as happy as you have made us by your presence." His smile was sugar-sweet, because he pretended that he cared for his cousins and because he had calculated that the Muni would reach the Pandavas' camp after Draupadi had eaten. The Pandavas would not be able to feed so many people, and feeling neglected, Durvasa might be angry enough to kill them. Duryodhan rubbed his hands in delight, inwardly praising his own intelligence and brilliant idea.

Just as Duryodhan had thought, Durvasa Muni and his followers arrived at the camp soon after Draupadi had washed her pot. Yudhistir put on a brave face and told his guests that he would serve a feast as soon as they had taken their bath. Durvasa Muni and his huge group of disciples went to bathe in the local river, leaving Yudhistir unsure of what to do. As usual, he went to ask Lord Krishna's advice.



“Call Draupadi and tell her to bring her cooking pot,” Krishna said. Draupadi thought the pot was empty but when Krishna looked inside He found a piece of vegetable stuck to the side. He scraped it out with His finger and popped it into His mouth. Meanwhile, at the river, a strange thing happened to Durvasa Muni and his followers.

They suddenly felt full as if they had eaten a huge meal. They did not know what had happened to them. They didn't know that Krishna was the cause, that because Krishna was satisfied,



everyone was satisfied. They rubbed their stomachs and talked about what to do. They agreed that they could not eat Yudhistir's feast and decided to run far away from his camp. In this way, the Pandavas were saved again.

Their time in the forest was filled with adventures, sometimes dangerous, sometimes unpleasant. Despite being protected by her husbands and surrounded by brahmins, Draupadi was insulted by lusty men who wanted to marry her.

Jayadratha had always wanted her and one day, when he was



riding to his own wedding, he saw her. He begged her to go with him. He jumped down from his chariot and tried to grab hold of her, but Draupadi threw a good punch. The huge muscular kshatriya fell to the ground like a tree cut at the root. Draupadi began to run away, but Jayadratha forced her onto his chariot. Bhima quickly rescued her.

The Pandavas were able to tolerate many injustices, because they had complete faith in Krishna and absolute loyalty to each other.

In their final year of exile, the Pandavas lived incognito in

the palace of King Virat. They took positions as servants in the palace and were careful not to be discovered. Draupadi was known as Sairandhri and she acted as the queen's maid.

When the queen's brother, Kichaka, saw her, he became mad with the desire to marry her. He did not care about her feelings. Draupadi told him that she had five Gandharva husbands who would kill him if he insulted her again. Still, Kichaka was not deterred. He asked the queen to make Draupadi accept him. The queen agreed and after a few days she gave Draupadi a pot of wine and told her to take it to Kichaka in his room. Draupadi begged not to go, but the queen insisted. Kichaka proposed to Draupadi again. As she tried to get away, he grabbed her arm. She broke free of his grasp and pushed him so hard that he fell to the floor. Draupadi knew she was in trouble. She had pushed over the most arrogant man in the land. Knowing he would grab her again, she ran to the king for help, but Kichaka followed her, pulled her toward him, and kicked her. The great warrior kicked a woman in public!

“Why don't you defend me?” she cried to the king, but he was obviously afraid of Kichaka. Bhima stood by watching. With all his heart, he wanted to kill Kichaka, but Yudhistir stopped him. That night Draupadi spoke to Bhima.

Draupadi had not been able to talk with her husbands for almost one year. She had felt lonely and this pain had been the hardest to bear. At last she poured out her feelings to Bhima.

“My dearest, you can't imagine how I suffer when I see my husbands as servants. Even the queen noticed that I am attached

to you and she teases me, saying that I love the cook. How can I bear such humiliation? I have been insulted in public. I have been assaulted before those who are meant to protect me. Day and night my heart burns to think of how that monster Duhsahsan touched me. And now I have been insulted before the king. How much more do I have to suffer? Will no one do their duty and protect me?"

Bhima didn't want to break their disguise, especially since their time in exile was nearly over. He tried to console Draupadi. "In just a few weeks we will be free and we will be established in our rightful positions again. Please try to be patient."

"If someone doesn't kill Kichaka, I will drink poison and die," said Draupadi.

Bhima softened. "Tell him to meet you tonight in the dancing hall. I'll be waiting for him," he said.

That night Kichaka covered himself with garlands and scent. Tingling with anticipation, he went to meet Draupadi. He entered the dancing hall and heard her sweet voice calling him. He hurried forward to embrace her, but Bhima jumped out from behind a silk curtain and seized the rascal by the hair. Bhima's punches felt like iron on Kichaka's chest. Both men were strong and brave. They fought well. Gradually Kichaka weakened and Bhima crushed him in a bear hug. Kichaka fell senseless to the floor. Bhima dropped onto Kichaka's chest, and strangled the life out of him.

Draupadi watched with satisfaction as Bhima pushed Kichaka's head and limbs inside his body and beat him into an



unrecognizable lump of flesh.

Draupadi spoke to the guards when she returned to her quarters.

“Go to the dancing hall and see the one who desired another’s wife killed by my Gandharva husbands,” she said. Soon thousands of soldiers were standing in awe around the remains of Kichaka’s body. No one had ever seen anything like it. They felt sick and trembled at the thought of a man who could have done such a thing.

When Kichaka’s body was being carried to the crematorium, a soldier noticed Draupadi watching. He called her an unchaste



woman and asked the king's permission to burn her along with Kichaka. The king agreed. Draupadi was placed next to the body and bound with ropes. Bhima heard her screams and ran to her, carrying a tree that he had uprooted on the way. He covered his head with a cloth, so that no one would recognize him, and smashed all the soldiers with the tree. Then he released Draupadi and returned to cook in the kitchen.

The people were afraid of this beautiful but deadly woman, and sensing their fear, the king asked her to leave. "Go wherever you like," he said, "but go quickly. Otherwise we are sure that the Gandharvas will destroy us."

Draupadi begged the queen to let her stay with her for two



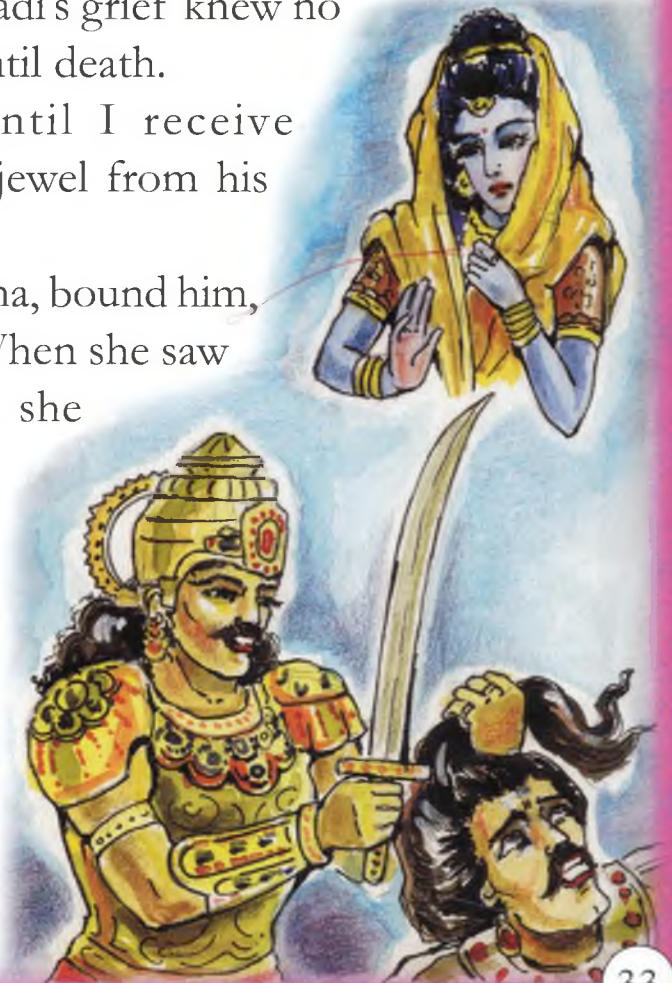
more weeks. The queen agreed and released her from all duties. At the end of two weeks, the Pandavas revealed their true identity and returned to Hastinapur to claim their share of the kingdom.

Duryodhan refused to give the Pandavas their land. “I won’t give you enough land to drive the head of a pin,” he said. Duryodhan’s greed resulted in the battle of Kurukshetra in which millions of soldiers were killed. At the end of the battle one of the Kaurava soldiers called Ashvattama broke into the Pandavas’ camp and killed Draupadi’s five sons, who were sleeping in their beds. Draupadi’s grief knew no limit. She sat down to fast until death.

“I will remain here until I receive Ashvattama’s body and the jewel from his head,” she said.

Arjuna captured Ashvattama, bound him, and took him to Draupadi. When she saw him tied up like an animal, she felt sorry and offered him respect due to a brahmin and son of their teacher.

“I have suffered so much because of the death of my sons,” she said. “I won’t be responsible for making another’s mother suffer in the same way.”



Arjuna cut the hair and the jewel from Ashvattama's head and drove him out of the kingdom.

Yudhistir ruled over the kingdom, and the people were peaceful and happy.

Then after ruling for thirty-six years, Yudhistir decided to retire and go to the north. His brothers joined him and they left without telling Draupadi, but she saw them going and, taking Subhadra with her, she followed her husbands to the Himalayas. It was a long difficult journey and, after months of walking, Draupadi fell down on the mountain and died. Draupadi had come to earth to play her part in helping Lord Krishna bring righteousness to the world. Order had been restored, Krishna had left, and there was no reason for her to remain.

When Draupadi fell down, Yudhistir said she had five husbands but she was a little partial to Arjuna. "Now she has left us all." The Pandavas kept walking and none of them looked back.

One by one they also fell and died on that mountain.



Draupadi returned to the heavens and resumed her form as Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune.



The Great Heroes of the Mahabharat are illustrated stories for the young and the young-at-heart. These simple narrations focus on individual personalities who were the embodiment of this greatest epic that was ever written. By reading about these great heroes one can quickly capture the essence and easy understanding of the Mahabharat.



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