BHIMA & HIS FOUR BROTHERS



ALES FROM MAHABHARATA

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MUNAVIRUL ISLAM HIGH SCHOOL
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BHIMA
AND HIS
FOUR BROTHERS

TALES FROM MAHABHARATA

by

ARUNA BHARGAVA



LALVANI PUBLISHING HOUSE
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To
MY LITTLE SISTER
PURNIMA

Who is always asking me
to tell her stories

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In this book the same old heroes of the Mahabharata come alive in the world of today. They speak the same language, use the same idioms, share the same jokes as our young readers. So together we look at these ancient heroes through modern eyes.

One character looms forward who in all these thousands of years has been kept in the background, overshadowed by Arjuna and Yudhisthira. This gallant young man is Bhima. Our young readers will love this new Bhima. He is tall, strong, good looking, witty and very very brave. He always sees the funny side of things. And above all he loves to eat. Bhima is the hero of this book.

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BHIMA

"Let's all climb that tall tree over there," said the ruddy boy named Duryodhana, "From that tree we will be able to see the whole forest and select what fruit we want to eat today."

"Yes, yes, Duryodhana, that will be great fun," said the rest of the boys clapping their hands.

"And let us pluck the fruit we desire by shooting an arrow at it," said Arjuna who knew he was the best archer of them all.

"All right," said Karna. "That's a good idea."

"We should have brought some water with us," said Yudhisthira, "I'm already thirsty."

"We might be able to spot a stream from the tree," said the twins Nakula and

Sahadeva shyly. They were the youngest of all the boys and always felt a little hesitant before making any suggestions lest the bigger boys should laugh at them.

However, this suggestion was accepted by all and the handsome twins flushed with pleasure.



"Where's Bhima?" asked Duryodhana who was always jealous of Bhima's strength and self confidence. He was always looking for opportunities to make fun of Bhima.

"Yes, where's Bhima," said the others. They climbed the tree in order to look for Bhima.

"Oh the forest looks beautiful," said Yudhisthira who always had an eye for beautiful things. Everybody looked around them and saw the vast forest with trees laden with fruit. There were thousands of flowers that tossed their heads and played with the wind. An occasional gust of wind carried their fragrance to the four corners of the forest.

Right in the centre of the forest stood the humble cottage of Drona, the learned teacher of these boys who were actually princes of royal blood. It was a custom in the olden days for princes and other boys who wished to study, to live in the forest for twelve years with their teacher and learn from him all that was to be learnt.

The Guru taught them to read and write. He taught them the Vedas and Shastras and the meanings of other sacred books. He

taught them archery, he taught them how to fight with the sword and other weapons. He gave them food, and allowed them to stay in his house. For all his services, in return he took nothing. And the students looked upon their Guru as God.

"There's Bhima," said the twins. Everybody turned to look in the direction pointed by the twins.

Far away under a shady mango tree sat Bhima lost in thought. Bhima was an exceptionally tall and handsome boy. His long muscular arms made him the envy of the other boys. His soft brown hair was never in its place. His large intelligent eyes had a dream-like quality about them. His smile captured the hearts of men and women alike. Bhima was a simple-hearted boy with a terrific sense of humour and he was very fond of eating.

"Hey Bhima. Yo ho Bhima!" came the shouts of the boys from the tree.

Bhima too cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted back "Hey you boys! What are you doing up there?"

"Why don't you come and join us?" shouted Yudhisthira.

"Yes we're going to pluck the fruits we want with our arrows," said Arjuna.

"You wouldn't be able to aim at a single one for you are a no good archer," said Dussasana, Duryodhana's younger brother laughing gleefully.

"And you'll want to eat all ours because you are such a big glutton," said Duryodhana.

"How dare you say such a thing to my brother," said Arjuna and a regular fist fight started between the cousins on top of the tree. "Hey, hey, stop it, stop it." Bhima came running. "What are you all fighting for? I'll give you as many fruits as you want."

Saying this Bhima caught hold of a trunk of a near by tree and shook it. A pile of fruits collected under the tree. He then shook up a couple of other trees. The boys just stared at him, their eyes wide open with wonder.

"I don't want to touch Bhima's fruits," said Duryodhana green with jealousy. "He is just trying to show off his strength." Duryodhana walked away. His brothers and his friend Karna followed. "It certainly needs a strong will power to resist all this fruit,"

said Bhima looking at his departing cousins. "All the better for us, we'll get much more."

Happily the brothers sat down to finish their fruit.

THE POISONED LADDOOS

A few years passed by. The boys were growing faster than one could imagine. Bhima was still the tallest. Duryodhana came next in height. There was always a great deal of competition between Duryodhana and Bhima for they were both strong and good at mace fight. At studies too they were almost equal—only Bhima was slightly ahead. This hurt Duryodhana's pride. He always wanted to be the best in everything. He was, therefore, always jealous and sulky.

As Duryodhana sat brooding under a tree, an ugly memory came flashing to his mind that made his eyes red with anger.

He remembered the vast tournament held by Drona, their teacher. What a tournament it was! Never had anyone witnessed so grand an affair. Thousands and thousands

of people came from far and near to see what Drona had taught his pupils. Kings and Queens from distant lands came in their mighty chariots and the rhythmic beating of the horses' hoofs were heard from morning till night. Often one came across a lone rider, hungry and thirsty, come a long way to watch the mighty tournament. Men and women from the near-by villages thronged to see their young princes.

For days together the place was buzzing with excitement. One of the items for the tournament was a mace fight between Bhima and Duryodhana. Both had been practising hard for it. "I must win. I must win," thought Duryodhana.

"I am going to win," said Bhima. Duryodhana could still remember how hard and loud his heart was beating when both he and Bhima entered the arena surrounded by what seemed a sea of spectators. Excitement was in the air. The audience clapped hard at the sight of the two princes.

"It's Bhima, it's handsome Bhima who is going to win," said some.

"No, no, Duryodhana's determination will win him anything," said others.

"But look at Bhima's muscles!" someone remarked.

"Shh, silence. The fight is about to begin."

"Oh it's begun, it's begun."

"O Bhima, come on Bhima. A bigger blow, a bigger blow. Ooh, watch out!"

"Duryodhana, bravo, what a smash, marvellous!"

"Bhima, you've got to win. Yes. That was wonderful."

"Duryodhana, come on! Do not be disheartened, give a quick and fast one."

The mock fight went on for quite sometime. The audience was so excited that they could not remain seated. They all stood up clapping and shouting.

However, one thing was clear. Like in everything else, in mace fight too, Bhima was slightly better than Duryodhana. Even the audience was beginning to see that.

"I wish Bhima was dead," thought Duryodhana.

"Dead, dead, that's it. Why not kill him? Now. This is my chance."

Bhima at once realized what was going on in Duryodhana's mind by watching his blows. The fight began in earnest. It looked as if it would take a deadly turn.

Drona got worried. He said to his son, "Go Ashwathama, quickly stop them before they kill each other."

Ashwathama came in between them and they had to stop.

"What a shame! What a shame!" came shouts from the audience.

"But Bhima is the better of the two," said one.

"Bravo Bhima," said some.

"Bhima is the winner," said others.

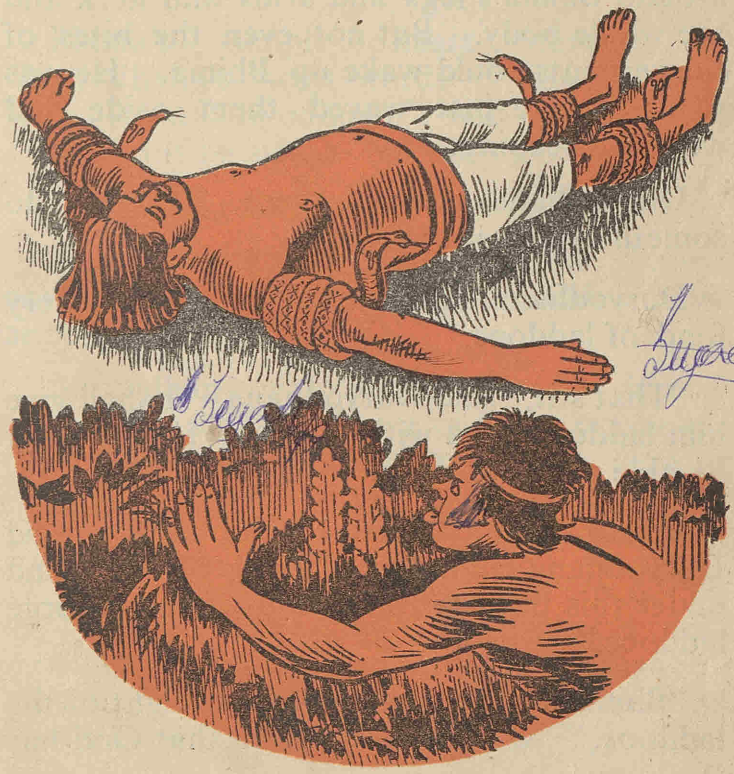
Duryodhana heard this and seething with anger he thought bitterly, "I shall kill Bhima for this. As long as Bhima lives, I cannot shine."

Duryodhana now began to look for an opportunity to poison Bhima. One day Duryodhana was walking through the forest when he saw that Bhima, tired after a hard

day's work, was fast asleep under a shady tree beside a pond.

"This is my chance," thought Duryodhana.

For many days Duryodhana had been collecting poisonous serpents in a basket for this day. At last the moment had come for which he had waited so patiently. So he



noiselessly went to the spot where Bhima was sleeping, opened the lid of the basket, threw down the serpents, and ran back. He hid himself behind a tree to watch the fun.

The serpents had been kept hungry for days.

They now skilfully coiled themselves around Bhima's legs and arms and neck and the whole body. But not even the bites of the serpents could wake up Bhima. He was so tired. He just waved them aside and went on sleeping.

Duryodhana got impatient. "I must do something," he thought.

Duryodhana knew that Bhima was very fond of laddoos.

"That's it," said Duryodhana. "I shall give him laddoos filled with poison. He will not be able to resist these."

Bhima, hey Bhima. Wake up!" said Duryodhana cunningly. "Look what I found under this tree. A plate full of lovely large laddoos."

"Bhima's eyes widened at the sight of the laddoos. "Of all the things that God has

created on this earth, I think laddoos are the best," said Bhima putting a whole laddoo in his mouth. "Hmm, these are good. Have some brother."

"No, Bhima, I do not feel like eating laddoos today," said Duryodhana. "I know how fond you are of laddoos. I would rather let you have them all."

Bhima's simple heart warmed to Duryodhana's sweet words. "That is very kind of you Duryodhana," said Bhima. "But I could not be selfish and eat them all."

"No, no, I really do not want any laddoos."

"All the better for me," said Bhima cheerfully and began eating one laddoo after another.

Duryodhana watched in wonder. Bhima showed no sign what ever of being poisoned. He seemed to be relishing the laddoos. Pretty soon he had finished the whole plate and he did not look as though he was dying at all.

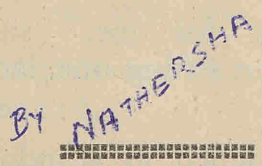
"Duryodhana, thank you once again for the laddoos. Frankly, I never expected such generosity from you. But now I must go back to sleep. I am so tired. All day long I have been chopping wood."

Bhima lay down and went off to sleep.

Duryodhana was left, speechless.

"What miracle is this?" he wondered. "I suppose it takes more than just poison to kill Bhima."

What Duryodhana did not know was that one poison removes the effect of another. The poison in the laddoos made the poison of the serpents ineffective.



THE PALACE OF WAX

In the north of India flow two rivers, the Ganga and the Jamuna. Dancing and skipping they go like two skilful dancing girls across the land spreading greenery and fertility all around them.

This beautiful land of the Ganga and Jamuna was ruled by two kings, Pandu and Dhritarashtra who were brothers.

Pandu had five sons—Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Dhritarashtra had a hundred—Duryodhana being the eldest. Pandu died early and his widowed wife Kunti came to stay at the palace of Dhritarashtra. Dhritarashtra became the sole king now with his capital at Hastinapuri.

When the young princes finished their education and came home, Dhritarashtra was

faced with a grave problem. To whom should he give the kingdom—Yudhisthira or Duryodhana? Yudhisthira was the eldest of them all. The kingdom should rightfully go to him. Yet Dhritarashtra loved his son Duryodhana very much and wanted to hand over the kingdom to him. He was in a fix. He did not know what to do. He worried about it day and night.

"Shall I be generous once and for all and give the kingdom to Yudhisthira to whom it should rightfully go?" he asked himself. "Or should I give it to my son all the same, knowing it is a wrong thing to do? What shall I do, what shall I do?" he kept thinking.

He decided to talk to Duryodhana about it. So he sent for Duryodhana.

"Duryodhana, my son," said Dhritarashtra, "I am faced with a big problem. The decision I take on this is going to affect not only the fate of our land but also the lives of many people.

"The Guru and uncle Bhishma feel that the kingdom should go to Yudhisthira who is the eldest. But my heart is torn apart at the thought of depriving you of the kingdom. What should I do? Now you tell me."

Santhosh Kumar.

Duryodhana had been waiting for this moment. He had a plan already. Cleverly he set about telling it to his father in a manner that would get his consent.

"Father, you know this, that if you give the kingdom to Yudhisthira there is bound to be war for I am not going to sit quietly and live on their charity. On the other hand, if you make me the Yuvaraja, this Bhima is not going to let me live. There is sure to be war in either case."

"I know son," said Dhritarashtra sorrowfully. That is why I am so worried."

"You need not worry father," said Duryodhana. "After all, what am I here for? I have a plan to send the Pandavas to Varnavati, where I have built a palace of wax. It looks beautiful and the Pandavas will not mind living there. After a few days we can set fire to it."

"What!" said Dhritarashtra shocked. "How can you talk so coolly about burning to death your own cousins? No, no I could never agree to such a sinister plan."

"That is the only way father. You have to destroy one of us, either the Pandavas or us, your sons. As long as both live, there is

bound to be a war. And a war will destroy all of us."

So Dhritarashtra gave orders. The Pandavas and their mother Kunti left for Varnavati.

As they neared Varnavati, they saw the tall stately palace, dazzling in its beauty.

"O it's breathtakingly beautiful," said Yudhisthira.

"It looks like a marble palace," said the twins.

"Even the gateway is decorated with arches and statues!" exclaimed Arjuna.

"May God bless Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana for being so kind to us," murmured Kunti with tears of joy in her eyes. "What a wonderful surprise this is."

"Don't waste your blessings on them mother," said Bhima. "I think there is more to this than what appears on the surface. I smell something fishy."

"Don't be so suspicious," retorted Yudhisthira.

Bhima did not quite trust Duryodhana. "I must keep a close watch on the palace,"

thought Bhima. "I must find out what Duryodhana is up to this time."

A few days went by. The Pandavas seemed to be enjoying their stay at the palace of wax. Bhima too was now becoming a little less suspicious but he still insisted on keeping watch at night.

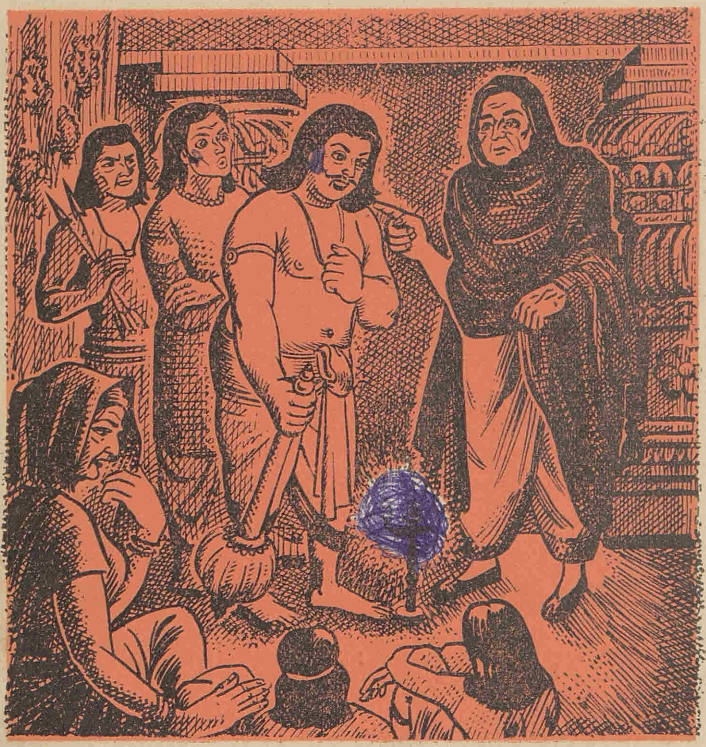
One night, when Bhima was keeping watch at the palace gate, he heard the sound of the hoofs of a galloping horse. Bhima could see nothing for it was very dark. The moon was nowhere to be seen. It was raining hard and a storm was raging.

"Who could it be on a night like this?" wondered Bhima and his mind became clouded with suspicions. The sound came closer now, but Bhima could still see nothing for there was a thick curtain of rain. Now the horse came close to the palace and stopped. A man wrapped up in a cloak jumped off the horse on the soft mud below. Bhima strained his eyes to see, but he could see nothing more than the vague outline of a man and a horse.

"Who's there?" shouted Bhima "Stop!"

"Is that you, Bhima?" came a tired voice.

"Yes, it is me, Bhima."



The man in the cloak came forward. Bhima lifted his lantern and saw the face of his uncle Vidura.

"O Uncle," said Bhima hugging him.

"Is anything wrong? Why have you come so far at this time of the night and in this weather?"

"You are in danger, Bhima," whispered Vidura.

"Come in first, uncle," said Bhima. "You are all wet and are shivering. First change your clothes and warm yourself. Then tell us what brought you such a long way at this hour."

Kunti and her four sons were delighted to see Vidura and greeted him warmly.

"You are in danger. Duryodhana plans to burn up the palace tonight. You must go away fast. This palace is made out of wax. In a matter of minutes the whole palace will be reduced to nothing," said Vidura.

"O dear, O dear, what shall we do now. Thank you for coming to warn us," cried Kunti.

"I came to know of this cruel plan only today so I rushed to tell you for there is no time to lose. The rain is now gradually decreasing. I think the moment the rain stops, they will set fire to the house."

"It would not be safe for us to go back to Hastinapuri right now for they are not in a mood to let us live," said Yudhisthira.

"I think for the time being we should disguise ourselves as Brahmins and take shelter in a Brahmin's house. That would be the safest," suggested Arjuna.

"I love disguises," said Bhima. "It would be quite an adventure."

"How can you think of adventure at a time like this?" scolded Kunti. "Come on now, hurry up, there is no time to lose."

"That's right. You must hurry up," said Vidura.

The Pandavas had hardly stepped out of the house disguised as Brahmins when the first flames arising from the house were seen. People living in the houses near by came running out.

"Fire! Fire!"

More people came and rushed to and fro bringing bucketsful of water and pouring it into the fire. Bhima just could not resist the temptation of going and joining in the fun.

"Fire! Fire!" he too shouted and ran here and there throwing water into the fire.

By now a large crowd had gathered around the burning palace. Great orange flames were reaching up to the sky.

"O the Pandavas are dead," cried someone.

"O the poor Pandavas are dead," said Bhima even louder.

"Bhima, Bhima, come on," said Kunti. "It is too dangerous."

"I'm watching the fun, mother," replied Bhima roaring with laughter.

By now the only remnants of the palace was a heap of ashes.

The people around began lamenting aloud for the Pandavas and Bhima joined in.

"Oooh, Oooh," cried someone.

"Ooh, Ooh," said Bhima.

Some of the people had now started watching this strange, tall, muscular Brahmana who was making a mockery of the whole thing. The children were giggling and following him about. The men folk were eyeing him suspiciously. But Bhima could not be bothered. He was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"We must act fast," said Yudhisthira to Arjuna, so they both walked up to Bhima, stood on either side of him, caught hold of his arms and brought him away.

The children clapped their hands and laughed. The women giggled and looked the other way. The men forgot to grieve for the Pandavas and amusedly watched the comic spectacle before them.



FOOD FOR THE RAKSHASA

The Pandavas took shelter at an old Brahmin's house, disguised as Brahmins.

One day the five brothers had gone out. Their mother Kunti was alone in the house. She had just started cooking when she heard someone crying. "Who could it be?" wondered Kunti. Pretty soon the crying became louder and it seemed as if many people were weeping bitterly.

Kunti rushed out of her room to find out who was crying so much and why. She was shocked to find that her kind host, his wife and daughter were all crying. His little son was sitting on the window sill waving a stick and saying in a shrill voice, "I'll kill him, I'll kill him."

Kunti was grieved to see the sad spectacle. She rushed to her hostess.

"Sister, why are you all crying? What has happened to make you so unhappy? You have been so kind to me. I cannot bear to see you like this. Please tell me."

"O Kunti," said her hostess. "We are doomed, our village is doomed." And she started crying louder.

"You tell me please," Kunti turned to her host.

"Maybe I can help."

"Nobody can help us now. Not even God can help us now," said the old man shaking his head gravely.

"But what is the matter? Won't anybody tell me? You tell me," said Kunti to the daughter.

The daughter only started crying louder and her shoulders shook violently.

"I'll tell you Auntie," said the little boy.

"There is a Rakshasa in our village. His name is Bhaka. What a funny name it is! Don't you think so Auntie?"

Kunti couldn't help smiling. "Yes son, but what did Bhaka do to make your father, mother and sister cry?"

"O he has not done anything yet. It is only what he is going to do that makes them cry. I am telling them that I will kill him but they do not believe me," said the boy waving his stick again.

"And why will you kill him, my dear boy? What is he going to do to you?"

"He is going to eat me up," said the boy smiling.

"What!" said Kunti. "What is he talking about sister?"

"You see Kunti," said the boy's mother, "this Rakshasa used to kill hundreds of people everyday. The people therefore lived in constant fear. They were afraid to step out of their houses lest the Rakshasa should carry them off. Life had come to a standstill and the people were miserable."

"So the elders of the village went to Bhaka," said the old Brahman, "and requested him not to indulge in indiscriminate killing. They promised him that everyday one house in the village would send one person and a cartful of food to the Rakshasa by turns. Today it is our turn," said the old man wiping his eyes.

"I would have gladly gone," said the daughter. "But Bhaka does not like to eat women and old men. We do not have a young man in our house so we'll have to send my little brother here."

"He is my only son," said the Brahman's wife sobbing, "and we got him after so much of sacrifices and praying." Kunti was deeply moved. She did not want this kind and happy family to suffer.

"Do not cry," said Kunti. "I have five sons. I will send one of them instead."

"I will send Bhima," thought Kunti. "Bhima will be able to tackle the wicked Rakshasa."

"Hoorah another adventure!" said Bhima chuckling happily, when Kunti told him about it.

Pretty soon it was time for Bhima to start. But Bhima had not yet finished dressing.

The old Brahmana who knew Bhaka's temper came knocking at Bhima's door.

"Bhima, Bhima hurry up it is getting late. Bhaka insists on having his food on time."

Bhima looked out of the window and saw that a crowd had gathered outside the house.

"Uncle," said Bhima, "What have all these people gathered here for?"

"They have come to see you son," said the old man.

"O Uncle, you mean to say that so many people are coming to see me. I cannot let so many people see me in this dress. This was only for Bhaka. Now I will have to change again and wear my silken clothes."

"Oh!" said the Brahmana hitting his forehead with his palm. "We've had it to-day."

Pretty soon Bhima emerged dressed like a prince. The people just gazed at him in admiration. Bhima loved to be the centre of attraction. So he gracefully bowed to the people.

According to the usual custom the whole village had come in tears to sympathize with the parents of the young man who was to be sent as food for Bhaka. Usually the young man to be sacrificed had to be forced into the cart. He would always be crying and trying to run away.

But here was a strange new sight. This handsome young man was helping in the preparations for his own sacrifice. He was

cleaning the cart and polishing it until it shone. He piled up the food himself. From his dress and manner he looked as though he was going on a feast instead of being part of the feast himself for Bhaka.

Then when all the preparations were over, with a majestic spring he alighted the cart and bowed and waved to all the people watching him.

Never before had Bhima felt so good as now with all these people looking up adoringly at him.

So he bowed again and taking the reins in his hands set out at lightning speed.

"I have an appointment to keep," he told the horses, as they galloped away leaving behind a cloud of dust.

As Bhima neared the appointed place beside the hill where he was to meet the Rakshasa, Bhima slowed down.

"All this food for the wicked old man? Never!" Bhima could never bear to see food being wasted so he set about finishing it off himself.

Bhima was already late and Bhaka's anger was mounting. On top of that the food sent


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for him was being consumed by Bhima. He roared like a lion and even the earth trembled with fear.

But Bhima did not like to be disturbed while eating.

"Shh," said Bhima, "what are you making all that noise for? Can't you wait?"

On hearing this Bhaka roared even louder and even the skies shook.

"You really are stubborn, aren't you?" said Bhima putting the last morsel of food in his mouth.

Bhaka was so furious that he lifted his huge arm and planted a blow on Bhima's shoulder. Bhima just brushed it aside as if he was brushing off dust.

This made Bhaka even more angry. He closed his huge fist and hit Bhima in the stomach. But Bhima's stomach muscles were so hard that poor Bhaka's knuckles broke.

"Ooh, Ooh," said Bhaka.

Thus a long fight ensued at the end of which Bhaka lay on the ground dead and Bhima sat in his cart and started homewards.

As he passed through the village, people came running out of the village, and out of their homes waving and shouting: "Bravo! Bravo! He's back. He's come back."

Children ran after the cart shouting and singing.

Bhima waved and bowed and felt like a hero.

THE MIRACLE CITY

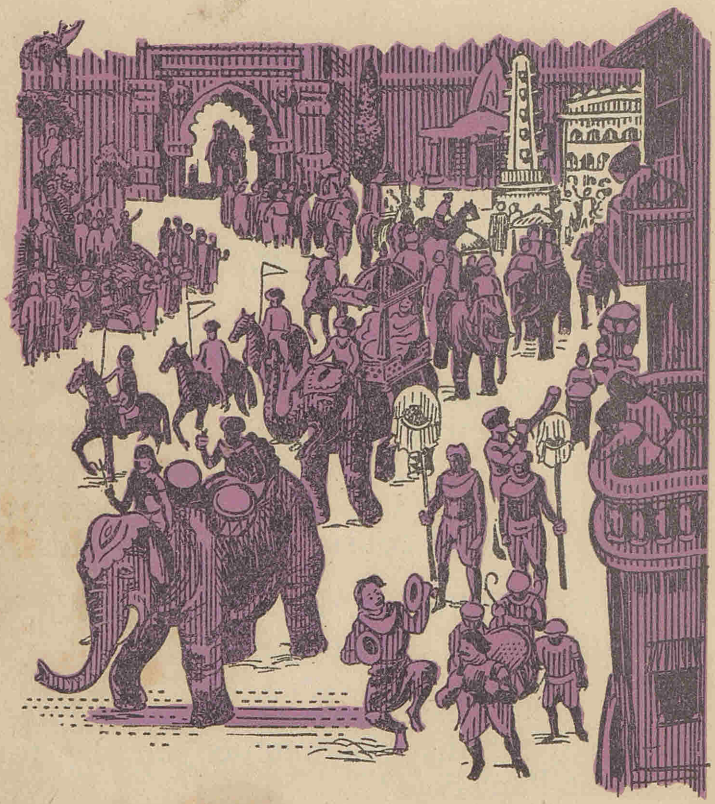
In the magnificent palace at Hastinapuri sat the blind king Dhritarashtra with Guru Drona and Vidura. "I have decided to partition the kingdom," said the old king. "It grieves me most to see the cousins fighting like this."

"We are delighted to hear this decision," said Vidura his face lighting up with joy.

"May God bless you," said Guru Drona. "Which part of the kingdom do you plan to give to the Pandavas?"

"I will give them the western part around the river Jamuna."

"Why that is nothing but forests and wilderness. Not a soul lives there. How do you expect the Pandavas to accept your decision to live there?"



"Why Vidura, have I not slogged to build this beautiful city of Hastinapuri? Have I not built my kingdom with my own hands? Then let the Pandavas do the same. For my sons I want to retain the fertile eastern part around the Ganges."

"At least you have decided to give them something. I am glad about that."

"I have heard that the Pandavas are staying at a Brahmin's place at the edge of the forest Varanavati. I shall send a messenger to give them the good news and bring them here."

Vidura immediately sent a messenger along with several horses and elephants decorated with jewels followed by many musicians. So in great pomp and style the Pandavas were brought back to Hastinapuri and handed over the western half of the kingdom.

While the ceremonies of handing over the kingdom were taking place, Duryodhana paced up and down his room in a fit of anger. He stamped his foot on the ground and mumbled and grumbled. But the Pandavas had been given the kingdom and there was nothing he could do about it.

The people of Hastinapuri rejoiced. Men, women and children alike ran out of their homes into the streets to hear the good news.

When the Pandavas left for their kingdom the people followed them to their realm. All the while they showered flowers on them and danced and sang with joy. But when the procession reached the western part, suddenly

the singing stopped, the dancing stopped. In a shocked silence, the people looked around them. The Pandavas' faces fell. All around there was a thick forest with wild animals running around. The trees were so tall and clustered so closely together that the sun could not penetrate through them. There was only darkness in this part of the land. Suddenly the people heard the sound of chopping wood. They turned around and saw their handsome hero Bhima cutting down the trees with an axe. Gradually each one picked up an axe and joined in. Soon the whole population of this new kingdom was once again in a cheerful mood.

They felled the trees, cleared the forest, built roads and wells, houses and hospitals, towers and turrets, parks and gardens, fountains and lakes. Above all they built the beautiful city of Indraprastha. The grand and mighty fort that they built still stands in Old Delhi telling us the story of the brothers who were righteous and brave, who despite heavy odds never lost courage.

Soon their fame spread far and wide and kings and queens from distant lands came to see this miracle of a magnificent kingdom built out of wilderness.

THE RAJASUYA YAGYA

In ancient India there was a very interesting custom. That was the Rajasuya Yagya. Whenever a king became very powerful he performed this Yagya. He sent his armies in all directions receiving submission from petty kings. Whenever anyone refused to submit or to accept his supremacy, they had to fight with the army. If they lost they had to submit.

The Pandavas grew from strength to strength. Their fame and powers spread far and wide. Krishna, the powerful king of the Yadavas was their friend and ally. So in order to have a formal announcement of their strength and power over all the kingdoms of ancient India, they decided to perform the Rajasuya Yagya.

Hundreds of kings, big and small were invited to Indraprastha to attend this Yagya.

The Pandavas also sent a messenger to invite Dhritarashtra and his sons. At first Duryodhana refused to go but later on his curiosity got the better of him and he decided to go.

Seeing the beautiful kingdom of the Pandavas, Duryodhana's jealousy knew no bounds.

"All this is mine. All this belongs to my father. It was a mistake to have given such a beautiful kingdom to the Pandavas. I shall see to it that this kingdom is taken away from them. In his anger and jealousy Duryodhana forgot that it was out of sheer hard work that this kingdom was built and that his father had given them only that land which was lying waste and which he did not want.

In the many splendoured courtyard of the palace sat the various illustrious kings and princes waiting for the Yagya to begin. There was gaiety in the air and everybody was eating, drinking and making merry. The musicians sat in one corner playing the sweet notes of their various musical instruments. The brothers were busy arranging for the grand feast that was to follow. All the kings were rejoicing except for two—Duryodhana

and Karna. These two sat by themselves in a corner finding fault with everything.

Everything went on smoothly until the question of principle honours came up.

"To whom should we make the principle honours?" asked Yudhisthira of his grand uncle Bhishma.

"To Krishna, my son," replied Bhishma. So Yudhisthira performed the honours to Krishna. Everybody accepted Bhishma's word and did not object except for a wicked and pompous king called Jayapala.

"We have been insulted," he thundered in a rage. When there are so many illustrious kings present, when there are so many elders present, where is the need to perform the honours to this cowherd ?"

There was anxious silence. Yudhisthira and his brothers realized that their Yagya was not going to end peacefully as they had hoped. King Jayapala was going to create trouble.

"I challenge you to fight with me," cried Jayapala, "you cowherd!" he sneered.

"Please be calm, please be calm," begged Yudhisthira.



"I shall be calm only after a fight with that cowherd," cried Jayapala.

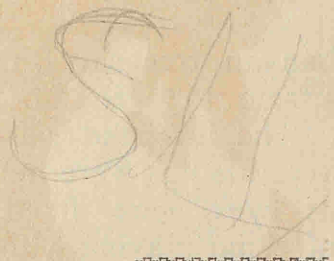
Krishna also tried to explain to him that he was willing to give up his right of receiving principle honours but let there be peace.

At this Jayapala jeered, "So you are afraid cowherd?" Saying thus Jayapala charged

This story is very good

towards Krishna with his sword. In the fight that ensued Jayapala got killed at the hands of Krishna.

The festive mood disappeared. Now nobody wanted to carry on with the ceremonies. The Yagya had been spoiled. The kings returned home sorrowfully. Only Duryodhana rejoiced.



THE STORY OF SISUPALA

Under a huge banyan tree sat Bhima idly pulling out grass from the ground. He was deep in thought. His forehead was creased with lines of worry, his lips were held tightly together and his eyes were fixed to the ground. The soft wind playing with his hair made him look more attractive than ever.

Nakula, Bhima's youngest brother came strolling down the garden towards Bhima.

"Brother you seem to be deep in thought," commented Nakula.

Bhima looked up and smiled. "Sit down Nakula," said he. "Now that the Yagya is over, there is so much calm and quiet everywhere that I am afraid that such peace may not last long and some trouble will come soon."

"What trouble do you expect brother and from whom."

"From Duryodhana of course and some serious trouble too. But what's bothering you?"

"Nothing much. I have been wondering, that's all. Why did Krishna kill King Sisupala?"

"That's a long story and a very interesting one at that."

"Tell me brother. I want to hear it."

"Long long ago Lord Vishnu was resting in his magnificent palace. His two trusted gate-keepers Jaya and Vijaya were guarding the gates. Suddenly a rishi with a flowing white beard and silvery hair came and stood in front of the gate.

'Who are you and what do you want,' demanded Jaya and Vijaya.

'Can't you see I am a rishi? Or are you blind?'

The two gate-keepers took in his appearance. Yes, he looked like a rishi all right. He wore a saffron robe and had a rudraksha-mala round his neck and carried a kamandal in his hand.

'So what if you are a rishi, the Lord is resting and he cannot be disturbed.'

'You insolent gate-keepers!' cried the rishi trembling with rage. 'Do you know who I am? I am the great rishi Durvasa. The whole world trembles when I get angry. Your own Lord Vishnu who cannot be disturbed now comes and falls at my feet to pacify me. But you two fellows need to be punished. I curse you that you will go to earth as human beings and be killed by your own master to whom you are now so loyal.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed the gate-keepers. 'Very funny. You think such a thing can really happen?' But just as they were saying it they found themselves shrinking in size. They became smaller and smaller until they were babies. All the while they kept screaming and waving their arms helplessly but Durvasa laughed and said, 'you are right!"

"So," said Bhima, "the gate-keepers Jaya and Vijaya came to earth as babies and grew up to become Kansa and Sisupala who were both killed by their master."

"But brother," said Nakula, "Vishnu was their master and they were killed by Krishna."

"But silly," said Bhima. "Krishna is none other than Vishnu himself born as Krishna."

"Do carry on with the story of Kansa and Sisupala. It is very interesting."

"The story of Kansa I shall tell you later. The story of Sisupala I shall tell you now."

"When Sisupala was born, he had 3 eyes and 4 hands."

"A real Rakshasa," muttered Nakula.

"If you keep commenting I shall not continue with the story."

"Oh, sorry. Please go on."

"Naturally Sisupala's mother got worried. She called the astrologers and the rishis and asked them how these extra features could be got rid of.

"Please do not worry dear lady," said one Rishi. 'When you place the child in the lap of a particular person, your son will lose these extra features.'

'Thank goodness,' said the lady with folded hands.

'But,' said the rishi, 'that same person will eventually kill your son.'

The poor lady wept bitterly but what could be done? What had to happen had to happen.

Now Krishna was the nephew of this lady. When he went to her place to pay her a visit, she placed the child in his lap. Immediately, the child lost his extra features. The mother wept bitterly and begged Krishna to forgive all the mistakes that her son might make in the future and not to kill him.

Then Krishna replied, 'I will bear with him until he makes a hundred mistakes. After that I can promise you nothing.'

So at our Yagya when Sisupala insulted all the elders and said such nasty things to Krishna, Krishna kept quiet and waited until a hundred mistakes were over. Then when Sisupala challenged Krishna to fight with him, Krishna agreed and during the fight killed him."

"Hey what's that? That looks like Duryodhana's messenger going towards the palace."

"Ah, mister!" said Bhima. "Come here, what's that scroll you carry in your hand?"

"It's an invitation to king Yudhisthira from King Duryodhana to a game of dice."

"Oh, I see. Go ahead and deliver it," said Bhima. "See Nakula, I told you this peace

will not last long and that some trouble is going to start."

"Yes?"

"Well it has started."

THE CROOKED GAME OF DICE

Yudhisthira had a great weakness for dice. He readily accepted Duryodhana's invitation.

Bhima smelt something fishy. So he warned his brother: "Please do not accept this invitation. Duryodhana is up to something. You can see that. Let us not play into his hands."

"Bhima you are being unnecessarily suspicious. The quarrel is now over and forgotten. After all we are all brothers, how can you forget this?"

Bhima did his best to dissuade Yudhisthira from accepting this invitation but Yudhisthira was adamant. He immediately sent a message thanking Duryodhana for his kind invitation and that he would be glad to come.

Now Duryodhana had a very crafty minister called Sakuni. He had a long crooked nose and thick bushy eyebrows.

"Now you just watch," he told Duryodhana. I have all the moves so planned that Yudhisthira will be reduced to nothing by the time we have finished with this fateful game of dice."

Duryodhana stroked his moustaches and laughed gleefully.

The Pandavas came and the game of dice started.

"Sakuni, you play for me," said Duryodhana.

"The rules of the game do not allow somebody else to play for you Duryodhana," said Yudhisthira.

"Hang the rules," cried Duryodhana. "Come on Sakuni. Play for me."

Sakuni settled himself comfortably and taking the dice in his short hairy hands began shaking them. Each time he threw them he won. Yudhisthira lost every single game, One by one he staked all he had—jewels. gold, silver, precious stones; palaces, horses, elephants; his servants, chariots, clothes, land, everything. Everything was lost to Sakuni.

Sakuni chuckled wickedly. "What will you stake now?" he asked, raising one eyebrow mockingly.

"What have I left to stake now? I have lost everything."

"You can stake one of your brothers," suggested Duryodhana. "Perhaps you will win this time and thus get back all you have lost."

"All right," said Yudhisthira. "I stake my youngest brother Nakula."

"Stop, brother, stop!" cried Bhima. "Do not make such a mistake. Please heed me. These people are playing a dishonest game."

"Yes, brother, do not play," said Arjuna.

Duryodhana and Sakuni smiled mysteriously.

"Scared off already?" they mocked.

"I will play just once more. Maybe I shall win back everything."

Once again Sakuni rolled the dice and once again Yudhisthira lost.

One by one Yudhisthira staked all his brothers and lost them all to Sakuni. Then he staked himself and lost again.

"What will you stake now?" cried Sakuni triumphantly.

"I will stake my wife Draupadi. Maybe this time I will win."

"Have you lost your mind?" cried Bhima. Others watched in a tense silence. Sakuni rolled the dice once more. Once more Sakuni won the Pandava queen Draupadi.

"Shame, Shame!" said all the courtiers and the elders present.

"Let me have one more game," begged Yudhisthira. "I cannot keep losing. Maybe this time I will be able to win back everything."

"On one condition," said Duryodhana. "If you lose this time, you will have to live in the forest for twelve years with your brothers and your wife. And after that spend one year in disguise. If during that one year you are found out, then you will have to once again spend 12 years in the forest and 1 year in disguise."

"Agreed," said Yudhisthira, confident that he would win this time. But alas as fate would have it he lost again.

"Dussasana, go and bring Draupadi here," ordered Duryodhana.

"If you so much as touch her," cried Bhima coming forward with his mace, "I will smash all of you." There was a sudden silence in the room. Dussasana stopped in his way. Duryodhana gulped and Sakuni fiddled with the dice nervously. They all feared Bhima.

Duryodhana found a way out. He turned to Yudhisthira and said, "You claim to be very truthful and just. Is it fair that after you have lost all to us, your brother speaks to us like that? Is this how you keep your word?"

This hurt Yudhisthira very much. For he was a man of honour and truth. He kept his word even at the cost of his life. "Bhima don't do that; we are now their slaves. We have to do as they order." In the meantime Dussasana went in and came back dragging Draupadi by her hair.

Bhima turned to Dussasana, "Leave her at once." Dussasana's hand trembled and he let go of her hair.

"Capture this mad man and put him in the lion's den," ordered Duryodhana to his men.

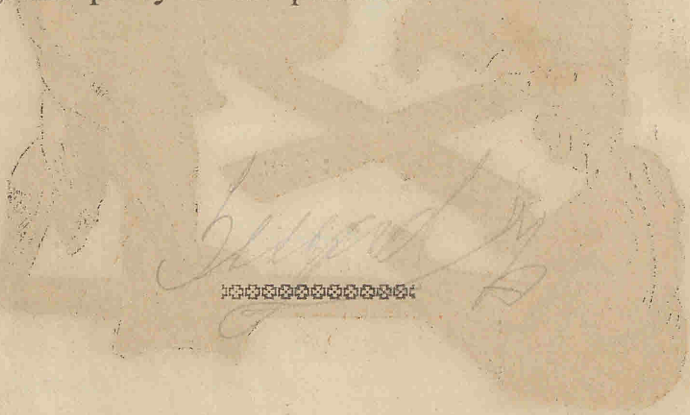


But his men were so afraid of Bhima that they dared not move.

Then Bhima turned to Yudhisthira, "Brother, now that you have wagered us all in the game of dice and lost, let us not suffer any

more humiliation. Let us all go to the forest, as promised by you, for twelve years and then spend one year in disguise. But remember Duryodhana, after that we shall return to claim all of our own."

The five brothers walked to the forest with Draupadi. Their mother stood at the palace and wept. The people of the town watched them go with tears in their eyes. Everyone was full of sorrow except Duryodhana and his companions who celebrated by throwing a grand party in the palace.



CHITRASENA'S VICTORY

While the Pandavas spent their days in the forest working hard, far away at Hastinapuri, Duryodhana's jealous mind gave him no peace. Again and again a fear gripped his heart that made him shiver. This fear was that after 13 years when the Pandavas return, he would have to part with half the kingdom.

"Karna!" he shouted. "Sakuni!" he cried. "Help me; tell me how I can prevent the Pandavas from claiming half of the kingdom."

"It is very very simple;" said wicked Sakuni with a deceptively gentle voice. While they are in the forest unarmed, finish them off."

There was a moment's silence. Duryodhana's face lit up. "Sakuni, you are a genius," he said. "Tomorrow evening we shall go to Dwaita vana and put an end to the Pandava menace."

But, unfortunately for Duryodhana, the day he chose was a day which Chitrasena the king of Gandharvas and his fellow Gandharvas had chosen for an excursion in the forests. The Gandharvas were enjoying themselves when they heard the beating of drums and blowing of conches. They wondered who the fool was who had come to disturb the peace in the forest. Then they perceived Duryodhana coming with his huge army. At the sight of them Chitrasena burst out laughing.

"What's so funny?" cried the arrogant Duryodhana.

"You," replied Chitrasena. "You have come with your royal army to fight these poor five brothers who live in this forest unarmed like hermits. Look at yourself and you'll see how ridiculous you are."

Duryodhana lost his temper and ordered his army to attack Chitrasena and his men. A stiff fight ensued in which the mighty Kaurava army lost so badly that the whole army dispersed and ran helter skelter. Even Karna went and hid himself in a chariot. Chitrasena captured Duryodhana, tied up his hands and feet and put him in his chariot and



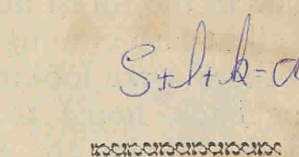
took him prisoner. The other Gandharvas did the same with Duryodhana's other brothers. This sorry procession of Kauravas was carried through the forest towards the land of Gandharvas. On their way they passed the hut where the Pandavas were staying. Just outside the hut Bhima was standing chopping some wood. When he saw the

funny spectacle he roared with laughter. Hearing him, his other brothers also came out and seeing Duryodhana's sorry plight could not resist joining in the laughter. Hearing all this laughter, Yudhisthira who was sitting inside the hut also came out to see what the matter was. When he saw Duryodhana and his brothers sitting in the Gandharva chariots with their hands and feet bound, he felt very sorry for them. He got very angry with his brothers for jeering at their own flesh and blood, their cousins, and begged Chitrasena to let them go.

"Well, since you ask me, I shall let them go otherwise I had no intention of doing so," said Chitrasena and ordered his servants to remove the chains and allow the Kauravas to go. Duryodhana was so humiliated that he could not even look up at Yudhisthira. He hated to have to be thankful to them whom he considered his greatest enemies on earth.

With his head hung he turned to go homewards. In the meantime Karna came out of his hiding place and tried to console

Duryodhana. But Duryodhana could not be consoled. "It is better to die than to owe my life to the man I hate most," remarked Duryodhana.



THE WAR

Fourteen years were drawing to a close. Thirteen long years in the forest and one year in disguise were all at last coming to an end. The Pandava brothers were looking forward eagerly to coming back home to their land, to their people and resuming the work of the kingdom.

In Hastinapuri the nobles and warriors gathered at a council in the palace to discuss the return of the Pandava kingdom to Yudhisthira and his brothers. At this moment a bejewelled chariot drove towards the palace. Krishna the mighty king of the Pandavas stepped down from it. Bhishma, Vidura and Dhritarashtra came forward and embraced him.

"I have come on a very grave mission, my friends," said Krishna. "I have come on

behalf of Yudhisthira to demand half of the kingdom which rightfully belongs to the Pandavas."

Duryodhana who was pacing up and down the hall, stopped. "I refuse," he shouted arrogantly.

"I hope you fully realise what this means," said Krishna. "This means war. A terrible war that will destroy all. Yudhisthira and his brothers have kept their word: for thirteen years they have lived in exile, denied of all comfort. One year they have spent in disguise as servants in a king's palace. Now they are asking for only what rightfully belongs to them. They come to you in peace. Live like brothers ruling your own kingdoms and do not bring about destruction!"

Duryodhana had lost all reason. He refused to accept Krishna's advice.

"Dhritarashtra," said Krishna. "Caution your son, council him, anger makes him blind to facts. The Pandavas are mighty warriors and so are the Kauravas. Together the brothers will be unconquerable. You have been a father to the fatherless Pandavas. Do not deny your children what is rightfully theirs. I plead for peace!"

Dhritarashtra turned to his son sadly. "Listen to Krishna, my son. He is wise. He speaks wisely. They are your brothers. The same blood runs in them as in you."

Jealousy had gripped Duryodhana's brain. He could not see reason. All the elders one by one tried to explain to him but he would not listen.

Krishna turned away sadly, and returned to the Pandavas with the sad news.

Two great armies prepared for a terrible war.

Kings from all over India wanted to join the war. Friends of the Pandavas joined the Pandavas and friends of the Kauravas joined hands with the Kauravas. The very earth seemed to tremble with the weight of marching armies, horses, chariots, elephants. Krishna joined the Pandavas, not as a warrior but only as Arjuna's charioteer.

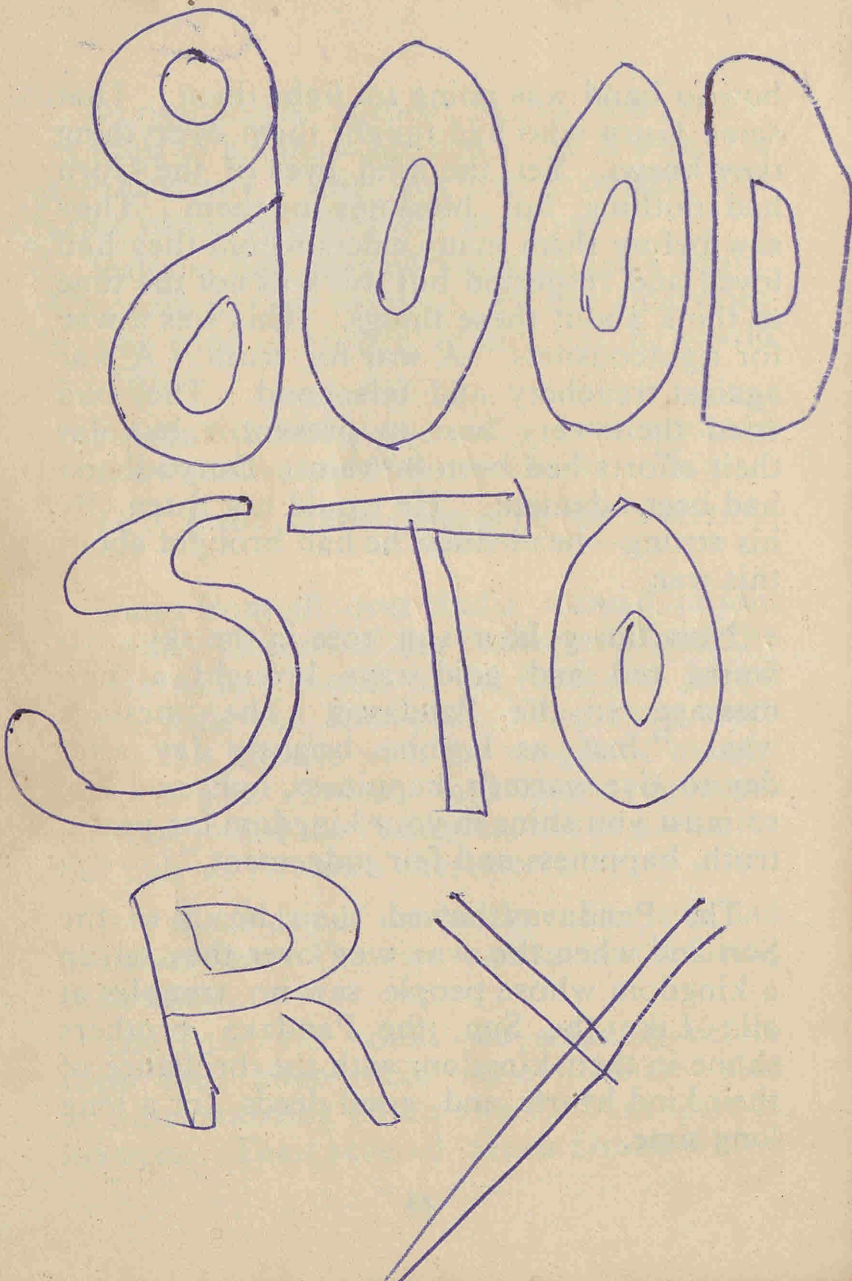
It was the day of the battle. The sun had not risen yet. The two armies stood facing each other.

The Pandavas could see standing before them their honourable uncle Bhishma, clad in white standing on his chariot with tears in his eyes. Their revered Guru Drona with a

bow in hand was going to fight them. That same Guru who had taught them everything they knew. Yet the kind eyes of the Guru had nothing but blessings for them. They saw before them many elders whom they had loved and respected but this was not the time to think about these things. This was a war for righteousness. A war for truth. A war against treachery and falsehood. They had tried their very best to prevent it but alas their efforts had been in vain. Duryodhana had been adamant. He would not listen. By his strong—headedness he had brought about this war.

Now the golden sun rose in the sky. Its warm red and gold rays brought a new message to the Pandavas. The message was: "Just as I shine brightly day after day to give warmth, happiness, light and life, so must you shine in your kingdom for peace, truth, happiness and fair judgement."

The Pandavas bowed their heads to the Sun and when the war was over they set up a kingdom whose people saw no troubles at all. Like the Sun, the Pandava brothers shone in their kingdom with the brilliance of their kind hearts and good deeds for a long long time.


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