

VOICE IN THE AIR: King!

When the evening rituals begin,
shadows of flesh-eating demons swarm
like amber clouds of twilight,
raising terror at the altar of fire.

KING: I am coming.
[*He exits.*]

Act IV

[*The two friends enter, miming the gathering of flowers.*]

ANASŪYĀ: Priyamvadā, I'm delighted that Śakuntalā chose a suitable husband for herself, but I still feel anxious.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Why?

ANASŪYĀ: When the king finished the sacrifice, the sages thanked him and he left. Now that he has returned to his palace women in the city, will he remember us here?

PRIYAMVADĀ: Have faith! He's so handsome, he can't be evil. But I don't know what Father Kaṇva will think when he hears about what happened.

ANASŪYĀ: I predict that he'll give his approval.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Why?

ANASŪYĀ: He's always planned to give his daughter to a worthy husband. If fate accomplished it so quickly, Father Kaṇva won't object.

PRIYAMVADĀ: [*Looking at the basket of flowers.*] We've gathered enough flowers for the offering ceremony.

ANASŪYĀ: Shouldn't we worship the goddess who guards Śakuntalā?

PRIYAMVADĀ: I have just begun. [*She begins the rite.*]

VOICE OFFSTAGE: I am here!

ANASŪYĀ: [*Listening.*] Friend, a guest is announcing himself.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Śakuntalā is in her hut nearby, but her heart is far away.

ANASŪYĀ: You're right! Enough of these flowers!

[*They begin to leave.*]

VOICE OFFSTAGE: So . . . you slight a guest . . .

Since you blindly ignore
a great sage like me,
the lover you worship
with mindless devotion
will not remember you,
even when awakened—
like a drunkard who forgets
a story he just composed!

PRIYAMVADĀ: Oh! What a terrible turn of events! Śakuntalā's distraction has offended someone she should have greeted. [*Looking ahead.*] Not just an ordinary person, but the angry sage Durvāsa himself cursed her and went away in a frenzy of quivering, mad gestures. What else but fire has such power to burn?

ANASŪYĀ: Go! Bow at his feet and make him return while I prepare the water for washing his feet!

PRIYAMVADĀ: As you say. [*She exits.*]

ANASŪYĀ: [*After a few steps, she mimes stumbling.*] Oh! The basket of flowers fell from my hand when I stumbled in my haste to go. [*She mimes the gathering of flowers.*]

PRIYAMVADĀ: [*Entering.*] He's so terribly cruel! No one could pacify him! But I was able to soften him a little.

ANASŪYĀ: Even that is a great feat with him! Tell me more!

PRIYAMVADĀ: When he refused to return, I begged him to forgive a daughter's first offense, since she didn't understand the power of his austerity.

ANASŪYĀ: Then? Then?

PRIYAMVADĀ: He refused to change his word, but he promised that when the king sees the ring of recollection, the curse will end. Then he vanished.

ANASŪYĀ: Now we can breathe again. When he left, the king himself gave her the ring engraved with his name. Śakuntalā will have her own means of ending the curse.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Come friend! We should finish the holy rite we're performing for her.

[*The two walk around, looking.*]

Anasūyā, look! With her face resting on her hand, our dear friend looks like a picture. She is thinking about her husband's leaving, with no thought for herself, much less for a guest.

ANASŪYĀ: Priyamvadā, we two must keep all this a secret between us.

Our friend is fragile by nature; she needs our protection.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Who would sprinkle a jasmine with scalding water?

[*They both exit; the interlude ends. Then a DISCIPLE of KAṆVA enters, just awakened from sleep.*]

DISCIPLE: Father Kaṇva has just returned from his pilgrimage and wants to know the exact time. I'll go into a clearing to see what remains of the night. [*Walking around and looking.*] It is dawn.

The moon sets over the western mountain
as the sun rises in dawn's red trail—
rising and setting, these two bright powers
portend the rise and fall of men.

When the moon disappears, night lotuses
are but dull souvenirs of its beauty—
when her lover disappears, the sorrow
is too painful for a frail girl to bear.

ANASŪYĀ: [*Throwing aside the curtain and entering.*]² Even a person withdrawn from worldly life knows that the king has treated Śakuntalā badly.

DISCIPLE: I'll inform Father Kaṇva that it's time for the fire oblation.

2. The *javanika* ("impeller"), a curtain hung over two doors separating the backstage area from the stage of the ancient Indian playhouse. An agitated entrance was indicated when, as here, a character entered the stage by throwing aside the curtain.

[*He exits.*]

ANASŪYĀ: Even when I'm awake, I'm useless. My hands and feet don't do their work. Love must be pleased to have made our innocent friend put her trust in a liar . . . but perhaps it was the curse of Duvāsas that changed him . . . otherwise, how could the king have made such promises and not sent even a message by now? Maybe we should send the ring to remind him. Which of these ascetics who practice austerities can we ask? Father Kaṇva has just returned from his pilgrimage. Since we feel that our friend was also at fault, we haven't told him that Śakuntalā is married to Duṣyanta and is pregnant. The problem is serious. What should we do?

PRIYAMVADĀ: [*Entering, with delight.*] Friend, hurry! We're to celebrate the festival of Śakuntalā's departure for her husband's house.

ANASŪYĀ: What's happened, friend?

PRIYAMVADĀ: Listen! I went to ask Śakuntalā how she had slept. Father Kaṇva embraced her and though her face was bowed in shame, he blessed her: "Though his eyes were filled with smoke, the priest's oblation luckily fell on the fire. My child, I shall not mourn for you . . . like knowledge given to a good student I shall send you to your husband today with an escort of sages."

ANASŪYĀ: Who told Father Kaṇva what happened?

PRIYAMVADĀ: A bodiless voice was chanting when he entered the fire sanctuary. [*Quoting in Sanskrit.*]

Priest, know that your daughter
carries Duṣyanta's potent seed
for the good of the earth—
like fire in mimosa³ wood.

ANASŪYĀ: I'm joyful, friend. But I know that Śakuntalā must leave us today and sorrow shadows my happiness.

PRIYAMVADĀ: Friend, we must chase away sorrow and make this hermit girl happy!

ANASŪYĀ: Friend, I've made a garland of mimosa flowers. It's in the coconut-shell box hanging on a branch of the mango tree. Get it for me! Meanwhile I'll prepare the special ointments of deer musk, sacred earth, and blades of dūrvā grass.⁴

PRIYAMVADĀ: Here it is!

[ANASŪYĀ exits; PRIYAMVADĀ gracefully mimes taking down the box.]

VOICE OFFSTAGE: Gautamī! Śārṅgarava and some others have been appointed to escort Śakuntalā.

PRIYAMVADĀ: [*Listening.*] Hurry! Hurry! The sages are being called to go to Hastināpura.

ANASŪYĀ: [*Reentering with pots of ointments in her hands.*] Come, friend! Let's go!

PRIYAMVADĀ: [*Looking around.*] Śakuntalā stands at sunrise with freshly washed hair while the female ascetics bless her with hand-

3. Here, the *śamī* tree, which Indians consider the repository of fire. 4. Materials prepared by women for the ritual of farewell to a young woman moving from her father's to her husband's home.

fuls of wild rice and auspicious words of farewell. Let's go to her together.

[*The two approach as ŚAKUNTALĀ enters with GAUTAMĪ and other female ascetics, and strikes a posture as described. One after another, the female ascetics address her.*]

FIRST FEMALE ASCETIC: Child, win the title "Chief Queen" as a sign of your husband's high esteem!

SECOND FEMALE ASCETIC: Child, be a mother to heroes!

THIRD FEMALE ASCETIC: Child, be honored by your husband!

BOTH FRIENDS: This happy moment is no time for tears, friend.

[*Wiping away her tears, they calm her with dance gestures.*]

PRIYAMVADĀ: Your beauty deserves jewels, not these humble things we've gathered in the hermitage.

[*Two boy ascetics enter with offerings in their hands.*]

BOTH BOYS: Here is an ornament for you!

[*Everyone looks amazed.*]

GAUTAMĪ: Nārada, my child, where did this come from?

FIRST BOY: From Father Kaṇva's power.

GAUTAMĪ: Was it his mind's magic?

SECOND BOY: Not at all! Listen! You ordered us to bring flowers from the forest trees for Śakuntalā.

One tree produced this white silk cloth,
another poured resinous lac to redden her feet—
the tree nymphs produced jewels in hands
that stretched from branches like young shoots.⁵

PRIYAMVADĀ: [*Watching ŚAKUNTALĀ.*] This is a sign that royal fortune will come to you in your husband's house.

[*ŚAKUNTALĀ mimes modesty.*]

FIRST BOY: Gautama, come quickly! Father Kaṇva is back from bathing. We'll tell him how the trees honor her.

SECOND BOY: As you say.

[*The two exit.*]

BOTH FRIENDS: We've never worn them ourselves, but we'll put these jewels on your limbs the way they look in pictures.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I trust your skill.

[*Both friends mime ornamenting her. Then KAṆVA enters, fresh from his bath.*]

KAṆVA:

My heart is touched with sadness
since Śakuntalā must go today,
my throat is choked with sobs,
my eyes are dulled by worry—
if a disciplined ascetic
suffers so deeply from love,

5. The verse suggests that Śakuntalā is a kinswoman of the tree goddesses (*yakṣīs*), worshiped in popular cults. Lac: a substance secreted by a species of beetle, used by Indian women as a cosmetic dye for coloring fingernails and toenails.

how do fathers bear the pain
of each daughter's parting?⁶

[*He walks around.*]

BOTH FRIENDS: Śakuntalā, your jewels are in place; now put on the pair of silken cloths.

[*Standing, ŚAKUNTALĀ wraps them.*]

GAUTAMĪ: Child, your father has come. His eyes filled with tears of joy embrace you. Greet him reverently!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Modestly.*] Father, I welcome you.

KANVA: Child,

May your husband honor you
the way Yayāti honored Śarmiṣṭhā.
As she bore her son Puru,⁷
may you bear an imperial prince.

GAUTAMĪ: Sir, this is a blessing, not just a prayer.

KANVA: Child, walk around the sacrificial fires!⁸

[*All walk around; KANVA intoning a prayer in Vedic meter.*⁹]

Perfectly placed around the main altar,
fed with fuel, strewn with holy grass,
destroying sin by incense from oblations,
may these sacred fires purify you!

You must leave now! [*Looking around.*] Where are Śārṅgarava and the others?

DISCIPLE: [*Entering.*] Here we are, sir!

KANVA: You show your sister the way!

ŚĀRṅGARAVA: Come this way!

[*They walk around.*]

KANVA: Listen, you trees that grow in our grove!

Until you were well watered
she could not bear to drink;
she loved you too much
to pluck your flowers for her hair;
the first time your buds bloomed,
she blossomed with joy—
may you all bless Śakuntalā
as she leaves for her husband's house.

[*Miming that he hears a cuckoo's cry.*]

The trees of her forest family
have blessed Śakuntalā—
the cuckoo's melodious song
announces their response.

6. A celebrated passage, prized for its convincing portrait of an Indian father's sorrow at losing his daughter to another household. 7. Yayāti and Puru are ancestors of Duṣyanta. 8. Holy objects, persons, and places are honored by ritually walking around them. 9. The version of the Tristubh meter used in the Vedic hymns, the oldest scriptures of the Hindu tradition.

VOICE IN THE AIR:

May lakes colored by lotuses mark her path!
May trees shade her from the sun's burning rays!
May the dust be as soft as lotus pollen!
May fragrant breezes cool her way!

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[*All listen astonished.*]

GAUTAMĪ: Child, the divinities of our grove love you like your family and bless you. We bow to you all!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Bowing and walking around; speaking in a stage whisper.*] Priyamvadā, though I long to see my husband, my feet move with sorrow as I start to leave the hermitage.

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PRIYAMVADĀ: You are not the only one who grieves. The whole hermitage feels this way as your departure from our grove draws near.

Grazing deer

drop grass,

peacocks

stop dancing,

vines loose

pale leaves

falling

like tears.

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ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Remembering.*] Father, before I leave, I must see my sister, the vine Forestlight.

KANVA: I know that you feel a sister's love for her. She is right here.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Forestlight, though you love your mango tree, turn to embrace me with your tendril arms! After today, I'll be so far

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away . . .

KANVA:

Your merits won you the husband

I always hoped you would have

and your jasmine has her mango tree—

my worries for you both are over.

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Start your journey here!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Facing her two friends.*] I entrust her care to you.

BOTH FRIENDS: But who will care for us? [*They wipe away their tears.*]

KANVA: Anasūyā, enough crying! You should be giving Śakuntalā courage!

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[*All walk around.*]

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Father, when the pregnant doe who grazes near my hut gives birth, please send someone to give me the good news.

KANVA: I shall not forget.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Miming the interrupting of her gait.*] Who is clinging to my skirt?

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[*She turns around.*]

KANVA: Child,

The buck whose mouth you healed with oil
when it was pierced by a blade of kuśa grass

and whom you fed with grains of rice —
your adopted son will not leave the path.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Child, don't follow when I'm abandoning those I love! I raised you when you were orphaned soon after your birth, but now I'm deserting you too. Father will look after you. Go back! [*Weeping, she starts to go.*]

KANVA: Be strong!

Hold back the tears that blind
your long-lashed eyes —
you will stumble if you cannot see
the uneven ground on the path.

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: Sir, the scriptures prescribe that loved ones be escorted only to the water's edge. We are at the shore of the lake. Give us your message and return!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: We shall rest in the shade of this fig tree.

[*All walk around and stop; KANVA speaks to himself.*]

KANVA: What would be the right message to send to King Duṣyanta? [*He ponders.*]

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*In a stage whisper.*] Look! The wild goose cries in anguish when her mate is hidden by lotus leaves. What I'm suffering is much worse.

ANASŪYĀ: Friend, don't speak this way!

This goose spends
every long night
in sorrow
without her mate,
but hope lets her
survive
the deep pain
of loneliness.

KANVA: Śārṅgarava, speak my words to the king after you present Śakuntalā!

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: As you command, sir!

KANVA:

Considering our discipline,
the nobility of your birth
and that she fell in love with you
before her kinsmen could act,
acknowledge her with equal rank
among your wives —
what more is destined for her,
the bride's family will not ask.

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: I grasp your message.

KANVA: Child, now I must instruct you. We forest hermits know something about worldly matters.

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: Nothing is beyond the scope of wise men.

KANVA: When you enter your husband's family:

Obeys your elders, be a friend to the other wives!
If your husband seems harsh, don't be impatient!
Be fair to your servants, humble in your happiness!
Women who act this way become noble wives;
sullen girls only bring their families disgrace.

But what does Gautamī think?

GAUTAMĪ: This is good advice for wives, child. Take it all to heart!

KANVA: Child, embrace me and your friends!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Father, why must Priyamvadā and my other friends turn back here?

KANVA: They will also be given in marriage. It is not proper for them to go there now. Gautamī will go with you.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Embracing her father.*] How can I go on living in a strange place, torn from my father's side, like a vine torn from the side of a sandalwood tree growing on a mountain slope?¹

KANVA: Child, why are you so frightened?

When you are your husband's honored wife,
absorbed in royal duties and in your son,²
born like the sun to the eastern dawn,
the sorrow of separation will fade.

[*ŚAKUNTALĀ falls at her father's feet.*]

Let my hopes for you be fulfilled!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Approaching her two friends.*] You two must embrace me together!

BOTH FRIENDS: [*Embracing her.*] Friend, if the king seems slow to recognize you, show him the ring engraved with his name!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Your suspicions make me tremble!

BOTH FRIENDS: Don't be afraid! It's our love that fears evil.

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: The sun is high in the afternoon sky. Hurry, please!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Facing the sanctuary.*] Father, will I ever see the grove again?

KANVA:

When you have lived for many years
as a queen equal to the earth
and raised Duṣyanta's son
to be a matchless warrior,
your husband will entrust him
with the burdens of the kingdom
and will return with you
to the calm of this hermitage.³

GAUTAMĪ: Child, the time for our departure has passed. Let your father turn back! It would be better, sir, if you turn back yourself. She'll keep talking this way forever.

1. Śakuntalā's sorrow reflects the real world of every Indian bride as she permanently leaves the home of her birth to join the extended family into which she has married. 2. The son, heir to the throne, will ensure an honored place for Śakuntalā among the hitherto childless wives of King Duṣyanta. 3. It was a custom of Hindu kings (and commoners of the twice-born classes) to retire to the forest with their wives to concentrate on the spiritual life.

KAṆVA: Child, my ascetic practice has been interrupted.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: My father's body is already tortured by ascetic practices.

He must not grieve too much for me!

KAṆVA: [*Sighing.*]

When I see the grains of rice
sprout from offerings you made
at the door of your hut,
how shall I calm my sorrow!

[ŚAKUNTALĀ exits with her escort.]

BOTH FRIENDS: [*Watching ŚAKUNTALĀ.*] Śakuntalā is hidden by forest trees now.

KAṆVA: Anasūyā, your companion is following her duty. Restrain yourself and return with me!

BOTH FRIENDS: Father, the ascetics' grove seems empty without Śakuntalā. How can we enter?

KAṆVA: The strength of your love makes it seem so. [*Walking around in meditation.*] Good! Now that Śakuntalā is on her way to her husband's family, I feel calm.

A daughter belongs to another man—
by sending her to her husband today,
I feel the satisfaction
one has on repaying a loan.

[*All exit.*]

Act V

[*The KING and the BUFFOON enter; both sit down.*]

BUFFOON: Pay attention to the music room, friend, and you'll hear the notes of a song strung into a delicious melody . . . the lady Hamsapadikā is practicing her singing.

KING: Be quiet so I can hear her!

VOICE IN THE AIR: [*Singing.*]

Craving sweet
new nectar,
you kissed
a mango bud once—
how could you
forget her, bee,
to bury your joy
in a lotus

KING: The melody of the song is passionate.

BUFFOON: But did you get the meaning of the words?

KING: I once made love to her. Now she reproaches me for loving Queen Vasumatī. Friend Mādhava, tell Hamsapadikā that her words rebuke me soundly.

BUFFOON: As you command! [*He rises.*] But if that woman grabs my

hair tuft, it will be like a heavenly nymph grabbing some ascetic . . . there go my hopes of liberation!⁴ 20

KING: Go! Use your courtly charm to console her.

BUFFOON: What a fate!

[*He exits.*]

KING: [*To himself.*] Why did hearing the song's words fill me with such strong desire? I'm not parted from anyone I love . . .

Seeing rare beauty,
hearing lovely sounds,
even a happy man
becomes strangely uneasy . . .
perhaps he remembers,
without knowing why,
loves of another life
buried deep in his being.⁵ 25 30

[*He stands bewildered. Then the KING's CHAMBERLAIN enters.*]

CHAMBERLAIN: At my age, look at me!

Since I took this ceremonial bamboo staff
as my badge of office in the king's chambers
many years have passed; now I use it
as a crutch to support my faltering steps. 35

A king cannot neglect his duty. He has just risen from his seat of justice and though I am loath to keep him longer, Sage Kaṇva's pupils have just arrived. Authority to rule the world leaves no time for rest. 40

The sun's steeds were yoked before time began,
the fragrant wind blows night and day,
the cosmic serpent always bears earth's weight,⁶
and a king who levies taxes has his duty. 45

Therefore, I must perform my office. [*Walking around and looking.*]

Weary from ruling them like children,
he seeks solitude far from his subjects,
like an elephant bull who seeks cool shade
after gathering his herd at midday. 50

[*Approaching.*] Victory to you, king! Some ascetics who dwell in the forest at the foothills of the Himālayas have come. They have women with them and bring a message from Sage Kaṇva. Listen, king, and judge!

KING: [*Respectfully.*] Are they Sage Kaṇva's messengers? 55

CHAMBERLAIN: They are.

4. The buffoon is referring, in his own inimitable way, to the seduction of the ascetic by the courtesan and the thwarting of the former's quest for liberation from *karma* and rebirth. The buffoon's joke turns on the word *mokṣa*, which means "release," in the physical sense as well as in the spiritual one of liberation from *karma*. 5. Alludes to the power of art to revive buried memories of experiences from former lives. 6. According to Hindu mythology the earth rests on Sesā, the cosmic serpent. *Sun's* steeds: see n. 7, p. 753.

KING: Inform the teacher Somarāta that he should welcome the ascetics with the prescribed rites and then bring them to me himself. I'll wait in a place suitable for greeting them.

CHAMBERLAIN: As the king commands. [*He exits.*]

KING: [*Rising.*] Vetravati, lead the way to the fire sanctuary.

DOORKEEPER: Come this way, king!

KING: [*Walking around, showing fatigue.*] Every other creature is happy when the object of his desire is won, but for kings success contains a core of suffering.

High office only leads to greater greed;
just perfecting its rewards is wearisome—
a kingdom is more trouble than it's worth,
like a royal umbrella one holds alone.

TWO BARDS OFFSTAGE: Victory to you, king!

FIRST BARD:

You sacrifice your pleasures every day
to labor for your subjects—
as a tree endures burning heat
to give shade from the summer sun.

SECOND BARD:

You punish villains with your rod of justice,
you reconcile disputes, you grant protection—
most relatives are loyal only in hope of gain,
but you treat all your subjects like kinsmen.

KING: My weary mind is revived. [*He walks around.*]

DOORKEEPER: The terrace of the fire sanctuary is freshly washed and the cow is waiting to give milk for the oblation. Let the king ascend!

KING: Vetravati, why has Father Kaṇva sent these sages to me?

Does something hinder their ascetic life?
Or threaten creatures in the sacred forest?
Or do my sins stunt the flowering vines?
My mind is filled with conflicting doubts.

DOORKEEPER: I would guess that these sages rejoice in your virtuous conduct and come to honor you.

[*The ascetics enter; ŚAKUNTALĀ is in front with GAUTAMĪ; the CHAMBERLAIN and the KING's PRIEST are in front of her.*]

CHAMBERLAIN: Come this way, sirs!

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: Śāradvata, my friend:

I know that this renowned king is righteous
and none of the social classes follows evil ways,
but my mind is so accustomed to seclusion
that the palace feels like a house in flames.

ŚĀRADVATA: I've felt the same way ever since we entered the city.

As if I were freshly bathed, seeing a filthy man,
pure while he's defiled, awake while he's asleep,

as if I were a free man watching a prisoner,
I watch this city mired in pleasures.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Indicating she feels an omen.*] Why is my right eye twitching? 100

GAUTAMĪ: Child, your husband's family gods turn bad fortune into blessings! [*They walk around.*]

PRIEST: [*Indicating the KING.*] Ascetics, the guardian of sacred order has left the seat of justice and awaits you now. Behold him! 105

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: Great priest, he seems praiseworthy, but we expect no less.

Boughs bend, heavy with ripened fruit,
clouds descend with fresh rain,
noble men are gracious with wealth—
this is the nature of bountiful things. 110

DOORKEEPER: King, their faces look calm. I'm sure that the sages have confidence in what they're doing.

KING: [*Seeing ŚAKUNTALĀ.*]

Who is she? Carefully veiled
to barely reveal her body's beauty,
surrounded by the ascetics
—like a bud among withered leaves. 115

DOORKEEPER: King, I feel curious and puzzled too. Surely her form deserves closer inspection.

KING: Let her be! One should not stare at another man's wife! 120

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Placing her hand on her chest, she speaks to herself.*] My heart, why are you quivering? Be quiet while I learn my noble husband's feelings.

PRIEST: [*Going forward.*] These ascetics have been honored with due ceremony. They have a message from their teacher. The king should hear them! 125

KING: I am paying attention.

SAGES: [*Raising their hands in a gesture of greeting.*] May you be victorious, king! 130

KING: I salute you all!

SAGES: May your desires be fulfilled!

KING: Do the sages perform austerities unhampered?

SAGES:

Who would dare obstruct the rites
of holy men whom you protect—
how can darkness descend
when the sun's rays shine? 135

KING: My title "king" is more meaningful now. Is the world blessed by Father Kaṇva's health?

SAGES: Saints control their own health. He asks about your welfare and sends this message . . . 140

KING: What does he command?

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: At the time you secretly met and married my daughter, affection made me pardon you both.

We remember you to be a prince of honor;
Śakuntalā is virtue incarnate—
the creator cannot be condemned
for mating the perfect bride and groom.

And now that she is pregnant, receive her and perform your sacred duty together.

GAUTAMĪ: Sir, I have something to say, though I wasn't appointed to speak:

She ignored her elders
and you failed to ask her kinsmen—
since you acted on your own,
what can I say to you now?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: What does my noble husband say?

KING: What has been proposed?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*To herself.*] The proposal is as clear as fire.

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: What's this? Your Majesty certainly knows the ways of the world!

People suspect a married woman who stays
with her kinsmen, even if she is chaste—
a young wife should live with her husband,
no matter how he despises her.

KING: Did I ever marry you?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Visibly dejected, speaking to herself.*] Now your fears are real, my heart!

ŚĀRṆGARAVA:

Does one turn away from duty in contempt
because his own actions repulse him?

KING: Why ask this insulting question?

ŚĀRṆGARAVA:

Such transformations take shape
when men are drunk with power.

KING: This censure is clearly directed at me.

GAUTAMĪ: Child, this is no time to be modest. I'll remove your veil.
Then your husband will recognize you.

[*She does so.*]

KING: [*Staring at ŚAKUNTALĀ.*]

Must I judge whether I ever married
the flawless beauty they offer me now?
I cannot love her or leave her, like a bee
near a jasmine filled with frost at dawn.

[*He shows hesitation.*]

DOORKEEPER: Our king has a strong sense of justice. Who else would hesitate when beauty like this is handed to him?

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: King, why do you remain silent?

KING: Ascetics, even though I'm searching my mind, I don't remember marrying this lady. How can I accept a woman who is visibly pregnant when I doubt that I am the cause?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*In a stage whisper.*] My lord casts doubt on our marriage. Why were my hopes so high?

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: It can't be!

Are you going to insult the sage
who pardons the girl you seduced
and bids you keep his stolen wealth,
treating a thief like you with honor?

ŚĀRADVATA: Śārṅgarava, stop now! Śakuntalā, we have delivered our message and the king has responded. He must be shown some proof.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*In a stage whisper.*] When passion can turn to this, what's the use of reminding him? But, it's up to me to prove my honor now. [*Aloud.*] My noble husband . . . [*She breaks off when this is half-spoken.*] Since our marriage is in doubt, this is no way to address him. Puru king, you do wrong to reject a simple-hearted person with such words after you deceived her in the hermitage.

KING: [*Covering his ears.*] Stop this shameful talk!

Are you trying to stain my name
and drag me to ruin—
like a river eroding her own banks,
soiling water and uprooting trees?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Very well! If it's really true that fear of taking another man's wife turns you away, then this ring will revive your memory and remove your doubt.

KING: An excellent idea!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Touching the place where the ring had been.*] I'm lost! The ring is gone from my finger. [*She looks despairingly at GAUTAMĪ.*]

GAUTAMĪ: The ring must have fallen off while you were bathing in the holy waters at the shrine of the goddess near Indra's grove.

KING: [*Smiling.*] And so they say the female sex is cunning.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Fate has shown its power. Yet, I will tell you something else.

KING: I am still obliged to listen.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: One day, in a jasmine bower, you held a lotus-leaf cup full of water in your hand.

KING: We hear you.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: At that moment the buck I treated as my son approached. You coaxed it with the water, saying that it should drink first. But he didn't trust you and wouldn't drink from your hand. When I took the water, his trust returned. Then you jested, "Every creature trusts what its senses know. You both belong to the forest."

KING: Thus do women further their own ends by attracting eager men with the honey of false words.

GAUTAMĪ: Great king, you are wrong to speak this way. This child raised in an ascetics' grove doesn't know deceit.

KING: Old woman,

When naive female beasts show cunning,
what can we expect of women who reason?
Don't cuckoos let other birds nurture
their eggs and teach the chicks to fly?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Angrily.*] Evil man! you see everything distorted by your own ignoble heart. Who would want to imitate you now, hiding behind your show of justice, like a well overgrown with weeds?

KING: [*To himself.*] Her anger does not seem feigned; it makes me doubt myself.

When the absence of love's memory
made me deny a secret affair with her,
this fire-eyed beauty bent her angry brows
and seemed to break the bow of love.⁷

[*Aloud.*] Lady, Duṣyanta's conduct is renowned, so what you say is groundless.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: All right! I may be a self-willed wanton woman! But it was faith in the Puru dynasty that brought me into the power of a man with honey in his words and poison in his heart. [*She covers her face at the end of the speech and weeps.*]

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: A willful act unchecked always causes pain.

One should be cautious
in forming a secret union—
unless a lover's heart is clear,
affection turns to poison.

KING: But sir, why do you demean me with such warnings? Do you trust the lady?

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: [*Scornfully.*] You have learned everything backwards.

If you suspect the word of one
whose nature knows no guile,
then you can only trust
people who practice deception.

KING: I presume you speak the truth. Let us assume so. But what could I gain by deceiving this woman?

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: Ruin.

KING: Ruin? A Puru king has no reason to want his own ruin!

ŚĀRADVATA: Śārṅgarava, this talk is pointless. We have delivered our master's message and should return.

Since you married her, abandon her or take her—
absolute is the power a husband has over his wife.

GAUTAMĪ: You go ahead.

[*They start to go.*]

7. Of the love god Kāma.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: What? Am I deceived by this cruel man and then abandoned by you? [*She tries to follow them.*]

GAUTAMĪ: [*Stopping.*] Śārṅgarava my son, Śakuntalā is following us, crying pitifully. What will my child do now that her husband has refused her?

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: [*Turning back angrily.*] Bold woman, do you still insist on having your way?

[*ŚAKUNTALĀ trembles in fear.*]

If you are what the king says you are,
you don't belong in Father Kaṇva's family—
if you know that your marriage vow is pure,
you can bear slavery in your husband's house.

Stay! We must go on!

KING: Ascetic, why do you disappoint the lady too?

The moon only makes lotuses open,
the sun's light awakens lilies—
a king's discipline forbids him
to touch another man's wife.

ŚĀRṆGARAVA: If you forget a past affair because of some present attachment, why do you fear injustice now?

KING: [*To the PRIEST.*] Sir I ask you to weigh the alternatives:

Since it's unclear whether I'm deluded
or she is speaking falsely—
should I risk abandoning a wife
or being tainted by another man's?

PRIEST: [*Deliberating.*] I recommend this . . .

KING: Instruct me! I'll do as you say.

PRIEST: Then let the lady stay in our house until her child is born. If you ask why: the wise men predict that your first son will be born with the marks of a king who turns the wheel of empire.⁸ If the child of the sage's daughter bears the marks, congratulate her and welcome her into your palace chambers. Otherwise, send her back to her father.

KING: Whatever the elders desire.

PRIEST: Child, follow me!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Mother earth, open to receive me!

[*Weeping, ŚAKUNTALĀ exits with the PRIEST and the hermits. The KING, his memory lost through the curse, thinks about her.*]

VOICE OFFSTAGE: Amazing! Amazing!

KING: [*Listening.*] What could this be?

PRIEST: [*Reentering, amazed.*] King, something marvelous has occurred!

KING: What?

PRIEST: When Kaṇva's pupils had departed,

The girl threw up her arms and wept,
lamenting her misfortune . . . then . . .

8. See n. 9, p. 754.

KING: Then what?

PRIEST:

Near the nymph's shrine a ray of light
in the shape of a woman carried her away.

[All mime amazement.]

KING: We've already settled the matter. Why discuss it further?

PRIEST: [Observing the KING.] May you be victorious! [He exits.]

KING: Vetravati, I am bewildered. Lead the way to my chamber!

DOORKEEPER: Come this way, my lord! [She walks forward.]

KING:

I cannot remember marrying
the sage's abandoned daughter,
but the pain my heart feels
makes me suspect that I did.

[All exit.]

Act VI

[The KING's wife's brother, who is city MAGISTRATE, enters with two policemen leading a MAN whose hands are tied behind his back.]

BOTH POLICEMEN: [Beating the MAN.] Speak, thief? Where'd you steal
this handsome ring with the king's name engraved in the jewel?

MAN: [Showing fear.] Peace, sirs! I wouldn't do a thing like that.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Don't tell us the king thought you were some
famous priest and gave it to you as a gift!

MAN: Listen, I'm a humble fisherman who lives near Indra's grove.

SECOND POLICEMAN: Thief, did we ask you about your caste?

MAGISTRATE: Sūcaka, let him tell it all in order! Don't interrupt him!

BOTH POLICEMEN: Whatever you command, chief!

MAN: I feed my family by catching fish with nets and hooks.

MAGISTRATE: [Mocking.] What a pure profession!⁹

MAN:

The work I do
may be vile
but I won't deny
my birthright—
a priest
doing his holy rites
pities the animals
he kills.

MAGISTRATE: Go on!

MAN: One day as I was cutting up a red carp, I saw the shining stone
of this ring in its belly. When I tried to sell it, you grabbed me. Kill
me or let me go! That's how I got it!

MAGISTRATE: Jānuka, I'm sure this ugly butcher's a fisherman by his

9. Because their profession involves taking animal life, fishermen rank low in the caste system.

stinking smell. We must investigate how he got the ring. We'll go
straight to the palace.

BOTH POLICEMEN: Okay. Go in front, you pickpocket!
[All walk around.]

MAGISTRATE: Sūcaka, guard this villain at the palace gate! I'll report
to the king how we found the ring, get his orders, and come back.

BOTH POLICEMEN: Chief, good luck with the king!
[The MAGISTRATE exits.]

FIRST POLICEMAN: Jānuka, the chief's been gone a long time.

SECOND POLICEMAN: Well, there are fixed times for seeing kings.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Jānuka, my hands are itching to tie on his execu-
tion garland.¹ [He points to the MAN.]

MAN: You shouldn't think about killing a man for no reason.

SECOND POLICEMAN: [Looking.] I see our chief coming with a letter
in his hand. It's probably an order from the king. You'll be thrown
to the vultures or you'll see the face of death's dog² again . . .

MAGISTRATE: [Entering.] Sūcaka, release this fisherman! I'll tell you
how he got the ring.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Whatever you say, chief!

SECOND POLICEMAN: The villain entered the house of death and came
out again. [He unties the prisoner.]

MAN: [Bowing to the MAGISTRATE.] Master, how will I make my living
now?

MAGISTRATE: The king sends you a sum equal to the ring. [He gives
the money to the MAN.]

MAN: [Bowing as he grabs it.] The king honors me.

FIRST POLICEMAN: This fellow's certainly honored. He was lowered
from the execution stake and raised up on a royal elephant's back.

SECOND POLICEMAN: Chief, the reward tells me this ring was special
to the king.

MAGISTRATE: I don't think the king valued the stone, but when he
caught sight of the ring, he suddenly seemed to remember some-
one he loved, and he became deeply disturbed.

FIRST POLICEMAN: You served him well, chief!

SECOND POLICEMAN: I think you better served this king of fish. [Look-
ing at the fisherman with jealousy.]

MAN: My lords, half of this is yours for your good will.

FIRST POLICEMAN: It's only fair!

MAGISTRATE: Fisherman, now that you are my greatest and dearest
friend, we should pledge our love over kadamba-blossom wine.
Let's go to the wine shop!

[They all exit together; the interlude ends. Then a nymph named
SĀNUMATĪ enters by the skyway.]

SĀNUMATĪ: Now that I've performed my assigned duties at the nymph's
shrine, I'll slip away to spy on King Duṣyanta while the worshipers
are bathing. My friendship with Menakā makes me feel a bond

1. Condemned prisoners were taken to their executions dressed in robes and garlands, in the manner
of sacrificial victims. 2. In Hindu myth two four-eyed dogs guard the path of the dead.

with Śakuntalā. Besides, Menakā asked me to help her daughter. [Looking around.] Why don't I see preparations for the spring festival in the king's palace? I can learn everything by using my mental powers, but I must respect my friend's request. So be it! I'll make myself invisible and spy on these two girls who are guarding the pleasure garden.

[SĀNUMATĪ mimes descending and stands waiting. Then a MAID servant named Parabhṛtikā, "Little Cuckoo," enters, looking at a mango bud. A SECOND MAID, named Madhukarikā, "Little Bee," is following her.]

FIRST MAID:

Your pale green stem
tinged with pink
is a true sign
that spring has come —
I see you,
mango-blossom bud,
and I pray
for a season of joy.

SECOND MAID: What are you muttering to yourself?

FIRST MAID: A cuckoo goes mad when she sees a mango bud.

SECOND MAID: [Joyfully rushing over.] Has the sweet month of spring come?

FIRST MAID: Now's the time to sing your songs of love.

SECOND MAID: Hold me while I pluck a mango bud and worship the god of love.

FIRST MAID: Only if you'll give me half the fruit of your worship.

SECOND MAID: That goes without saying . . . our bodies may be separate, but our lives are one . . . [Leaning on her friend, she stands and plucks a mango bud.] The mango flower is still closed, but this broken stem is fragrant. [She makes the dove gesture with her hands.]

Mango blossom bud,
I offer you to Love
as he lifts
his bow of passion.
Be the first
of his flower arrows
aimed at lonely girls
with lovers far away!

[She throws the mango bud.]

MAGISTRATE: [Angrily throwing aside the curtain and entering.] Not now, stupid girl! When the king has banned the festival of spring, how dare you pluck a mango bud!

BOTH MAIDS: [Frightened.] Please forgive us, sir. We don't know what you mean.

CHAMBERLAIN: Did you not hear that even the spring trees and the nesting birds obey the king's order?

The mango flowers bloom without spreading pollen,
the red amaranth buds, but will not bloom,
cries of cuckoo cocks freeze though frost is past,
and out of fear, Love holds his arrow half-drawn.

BOTH MAIDS: There is no doubt about the king's great power! 110

FIRST MAID: Sir, several days ago we were sent to wait on the queen by Mitrāvasu, the king's brother-in-law. We were assigned to guard the pleasure garden. Since we're newcomers, we've heard no news.

CHAMBERLAIN: Let it be! But don't do it again!

BOTH MAIDS: Sir, we're curious. May we ask why the spring festival was banned? 115

SĀNUMATĪ: Mortals are fond of festivals. The reason must be serious.

CHAMBERLAIN: It is public knowledge. Why should I not tell them?

Has the scandal of Śakuntalā's rejection not reached your ears?

BOTH MAIDS: We only heard from the king's brother-in-law that the ring was found. 120

CHAMBERLAIN: [To himself.] There is little more to tell. [Aloud.]

When he saw the ring, the king remembered that he had married Śakuntalā in secret and had rejected her in his delusion. Since then the king has been tortured by remorse. 125

Despising what he once enjoyed,
he shuns his ministers every day
and spends long sleepless nights
tossing at the edge of his bed —
when courtesy demands that
he converse with palace women,
he stumbles over their names,
and then retreats in shame. 130

SĀNUMATĪ: This news delights me.

CHAMBERLAIN: The festival is banned because of the king's melancholy. 135

BOTH MAIDS: It's only right.

VOICE OFFSTAGE: This way, sir!

CHAMBERLAIN: [Listening.] The king is coming. Go about your business! 140

BOTH MAIDS: As you say.

[Both maids exit. Then the KING enters, costumed to show his grief, accompanied by the BUFFOON and the DOORKEEPER.]

CHAMBERLAIN: [Observing the KING.] Extraordinary beauty is appealing under all conditions. Even in his lovesick state, the king is wonderful to see.

Rejecting his regal jewels,
he wears one golden bangle
above his left wrist;
his lips are pale with sighs,
his eyes wan from brooding at night —
like a gemstone ground in polishing,
the fiery beauty of his body
makes his wasted form seem strong. 145
150

SĀNUMATĪ: [*Seeing the KING.*] I see why Śakuntalā pines for him though he rejected and disgraced her.

KING: [*Walking around slowly, deep in thought.*]

This cursed heart slept
when my love came to wake it,
and now it stays awake
to suffer the pain of remorse.

SĀNUMATĪ: The girl shares his fate.

BUFFOON: [*In a stage whisper.*] He's having another attack of his Śakuntalā disease. I doubt if there's any cure for that.

CHAMBERLAIN: [*Approaching.*] Victory to the king! I have inspected the grounds of the pleasure garden. Let the king visit his favorite spots and divert himself.

KING: Vetravati, deliver a message to my noble minister Piśuna: "After being awake all night, we cannot sit on the seat of justice today. Set in writing what your judgment tells you the citizens require and send it to us!"

DOORKEEPER: Whatever you command! [*She exits.*]

KING: Vātāyana, attend to the rest of your business!

CHAMBERLAIN: As the king commands! [*He exits.*]

BUFFOON: You've cleared out the flies. Now you can rest in some pretty spot. The garden is pleasant now in this break between morning cold and noonday heat.

KING: Dear friend, the saying "Misfortunes rush through any crack" is absolutely right:

Barely freed by the dark force
that made me forget Kaṇva's daughter,
my mind is threatened by an arrow
of mango buds fixed on Love's bow.

BUFFOON: Wait, I'll destroy the love god's arrow with my wooden stick.³ [*Raising his staff, he tries to strike a mango bud.*]

KING: [*Smiling.*] Let it be! I see the majesty of brahman bravery. Friend, where may I sit to divert my eyes with vines that remind me of my love?

BUFFOON: Didn't you tell your maid Caturikā, "I'll pass the time in the jasmine bower. Bring me the drawing board on which I painted a picture of Śakuntalā with my own hand!"

KING: Such a place may soothe my heart. Show me the way!

BUFFOON: Come this way!

[*Both walk around; the nymph SĀNUMATĪ follows.*]

The marble seat and flower offerings in this jasmine bower are certainly trying to make us feel welcome. Come in and sit down!

[*Both enter the bower and sit.*]

SĀNUMATĪ: I'll hide behind these creepers to see the picture he's drawn

3. It is clear in the original that the buffoon's staff parodies Indra's rod (a symbol of virility) and the phallic arrows of the god of love.

of my friend. Then I'll report how great her husband's passion is.
[*She does as she says and stands waiting.*]

KING: Friend, now I remember everything. I told you about my first meeting with Śakuntalā. You weren't with me when I rejected her, but why didn't you say anything about her before? Did you suffer a loss of memory too? 195

BUFFOON: I didn't forget. You did tell me all about it once, but then you said, "It's all a joke without any truth." My wit is like a lump of clay, so I took you at your word . . . or it could be that fate is powerful . . . 200

SĀNUMATĪ: It is!

KING: Friend, help me!

BUFFOON: What's this? It doesn't become you! Noblemen never take grief to heart. Even in storms, mountains don't tremble. 205

KING: Dear friend, I'm defenseless when I remember the pain of my love's bewilderment when I rejected her.

When I cast her away, she followed her kinsmen,
but Kaṇva's disciple harshly shouted, "Stay!"
The tearful look my cruelty provoked
burns me like an arrow tipped with poison. 210

SĀNUMATĪ: The way he rehearses his actions makes me delight in his pain.

BUFFOON: Sir, I guess that the lady was carried off by some celestial creature or other. 215

KING: Who else would dare to touch a woman who worshiped her husband? I was told that Menakā is her mother. My heart suspects that her mother's companions carried her off.

SĀNUMATĪ: His delusion puzzled me, but not his reawakening. 220

BUFFOON: If that's the case, you'll meet her again in good time.

KING: How?

BUFFOON: No mother or father can bear to see a daughter parted from her husband.

KING:

Was it dream or illusion or mental confusion,
or the last meager fruit of my former good deeds?
It is gone now, and my heart's desires are
like riverbanks crumbling of their own weight. 225

BUFFOON: Stop this! Isn't the ring evidence that an unexpected meeting is destined to take place? 230

KING: [*Looking at the ring.*] I only pity it for falling from such a place.

Ring, your punishment is proof
that your face is as flawed as mine—
you were placed in her lovely fingers,
glowing with crimson nails, and you fell. 235

SĀNUMATĪ: The real pity would have been if it had fallen into some other hand.

BUFFOON: What prompted you to put the signet ring on her hand?

SĀNUMATĪ: I'm curious too.

KING: I did it when I left for the city. My love broke into tears and asked, "How long will it be before my noble husband sends news to me?"

BUFFOON: Then? What then?

KING: Then I placed the ring on her finger with this promise:

One by one, day after day,
count each syllable of my name!
At the end, a messenger will come
to bring you to my palace.

But in my cruel delusion, I never kept my word.

SĀNUMATĪ: Fate broke their charming agreement!

BUFFOON: How did it get into the belly of the carp the fisherman was cutting up?

KING: While she was worshiping at the shrine of Indra's wife, it fell from her hand into the Gaṅgā.⁴

BUFFOON: It's obvious now!

SĀNUMATĪ: And the king, doubtful of his marriage to Śakuntalā, a female ascetic, was afraid to commit an act of injustice. But why should such passionate love need a ring to be remembered?

KING: I must reproach the ring for what it's done.

BUFFOON: [*To himself.*] He's gone the way of all madmen . . .

KING:

Why did you leave her delicate finger
and sink into the deep river?

of course . . .

A mindless ring can't recognize virtue,
but why did I reject my love?

BUFFOON: [*To himself again.*] Why am I consumed by a craving for food?

KING: Oh ring! Have pity on a man whose hate is tormented because he abandoned his love without cause! Let him see her again!

[*Throwing the curtain aside, the maid CATURIKĀ enters, with the drawing board in her hand.*]

CATURIKĀ: Here's the picture you painted of the lady. [*She shows the drawing board.*]

BUFFOON: Dear friend, how well you've painted your feelings in this sweet scene? My eyes almost stumble over the hollows and hills.

SĀNUMATĪ: What skill the king has! I feel as if my friend were before me.

KING:

The picture's imperfections are not hers,
but this drawing does hint at her beauty.

4. The Ganges River.

SĀNUMATĪ: Such words reveal that suffering has increased his modesty as much as his love.

BUFFOON: Sir, I see three ladies now and they're all lovely to look at. Which is your Śakuntalā?

SĀNUMATĪ: Only a dim-witted fool like this wouldn't know such beauty!

KING: You guess which one!

BUFFOON: I guess Śakuntalā is the one you've drawn with flowers falling from her loosened locks of hair, with drops of sweat on her face, with her arms hanging limp and tired as she stands at the side of a mango tree whose tender shoots are gleaming with the fresh water she poured. The other two are her friends.

KING: You are clever! Look at these signs of my passion!

Smudges from my sweating fingers
stain the edges of the picture
and a tear fallen from my cheek
has raised a wrinkle in the paint.

Caturikā, the scenery is only half-drawn. Go and bring my paints!

CATURIKĀ: Noble Mādhavya, hold the drawing board until I come back!

KING: I'll hold it myself. [*He takes it, the maid exits.*]

I rejected my love when she came to me,
and how I worship her in a painted image—
having passed by a river full of water,
I'm longing now for an empty mirage.

BUFFOON: [*To himself.*] He's too far gone for a river now! He's looking for a mirage! [*Aloud.*] Sir, what else do you plan to draw here?

SĀNUMATĪ: He'll want to draw every place my friend loved.

KING:

I'll draw the river Mālinī
flowing through Himālaya's foothills
where pairs of wild geese nest in the sand
and deer recline on both riverbanks,
where a doe is rubbing her left eye
on the horn of a black buck antelope
under a tree whose branches
have bark dresses hanging to dry.

BUFFOON: [*To himself.*] Next he'll fill the drawing board with mobs of ascetics wearing long grassy beards.

KING: Dear friend, I've forgotten to draw an ornament that Śakuntalā wore.

BUFFOON: What is it?

SĀNUMATĪ: It will suit her forest life and her tender beauty.

KING:

I haven't drawn the mimosa flower on her ear,
its filaments resting on her cheek,

or the necklace of tender lotus stalks,
lying on her breasts like autumn moonbeams.

BUFFOON: But why does the lady cover her face with her red lotus-
bud fingertips and stand trembling in fear? [*Looking closely.*] That
son-of-a-bee who steals nectar from flowers is attacking her face.

KING: Drive the impudent rogue away!

BUFFOON: You have the power to punish criminals. You drive him off!

KING: All right! Bee, favored guest of the flowering vines, why do you
frustrate yourself by flying here?⁵

A female bee waits on a flower,
thirsting for your love—
she refuses to drink
the sweet nectar without you.

SĀNUMATĪ: How gallantly he's driving him away!

BUFFOON: When you try to drive it away, this creature becomes
vicious.

KING: Why don't you stop when I command you?

Bee, if you touch the lips of my love
that lure you like a young tree's virgin buds,
lips I gently kissed in festivals of love,
I'll hold you captive in a lotus flower cage.

BUFFOON: Why isn't he afraid of your harsh punishment? [*Laughing,*
he speaks to himself.] He's gone crazy and I'll be the same if I go
on talking like this. [*Aloud.*] But sir, it's just a picture!

KING: A picture? How can that be?

SĀNUMATĪ: When I couldn't tell whether it was painted, how could he
realize he was looking at a picture?

KING: Dear friend, are you envious of me?

My heart's affection made me feel
the joy of seeing her—
but you reminded me again
that my love is only a picture.

[*He wipes away a tear.*]

SĀNUMATĪ: The effects of her absence make him quarrelsome.

KING: Dear friend, why do I suffer this endless pain?

Sleepless nights prevent our meeting in dreams;
her image in a picture is ruined by my tears.

SĀNUMATĪ: You have clearly atoned for the suffering your rejection
caused Śakuntalā.

CATURIKĀ: [*Entering.*] Victory my lord! I found the paint box and
started back right away . . . but I met Queen Vasumatī with her
maid Taralikā on the path and she grabbed the box from my hand,
saying, "I'll bring it to the noble lord myself!"

BUFFOON: You were lucky to get away!

5. The king's preoccupation with the bee recalls the events of Act I.

CATURIKĀ: The queen's shawl got caught on a tree. While Taralikā
was freeing it, I made my escape.

KING: Dear friend, the queen's pride can quickly turn to anger. Save
this picture!

BUFFOON: You should say, "Save yourself!" [*Taking the picture, he*
stands up.] If you escape the woman's deadly poison, then send 370
word to me in the Palace of the Clouds. [*He exits hastily.*]

SĀNUMATĪ: even though another woman has taken his heart and he
feels indifferent to the queen, he treats her with respect.⁶

DOORKEEPER: [*Entering with a letter in her hand.*] Victory, king!

KING: Vetravatī, did you meet the queen on the way? 375

DOORKEEPER: I did, but when she saw the letter in my hand, she
turned back.

KING: She knows that this is official and would not interrupt my work.

DOORKEEPER: King, the minister requests that you examine the con-
tents of this letter. He said that the enormous job of reckoning the 380
revenue in this one citizen's case had taken all his time.

KING: Show me the letter! [*The girl hands it to him and he reads*
barely aloud.] What is this? "A wealthy merchant sea captain
named Dhanamitra has been lost in a shipwreck and the laws say
that since the brave man was childless, his accumulated wealth all 385
goes to the king." It's terrible to be childless! A man of such wealth
probably had several wives. We must find out if any one of his wives
is pregnant!

DOORKEEPER: King, it's said that one of his wives, the daughter of a
merchant of Ayodhyā, has performed the rite to ensure the birth of 390
a son.⁷

KING: The child in her womb surely deserves his parental wealth. Go!

Report this to my minister!

DOORKEEPER: As the king commands! [*She starts to go.*]

KING: Come here a moment! 395

DOORKEEPER: I am here.

KING: Is it his offspring or not?

When his subjects lose a kinsman,
Duṣyanta will preserve the estates—
unless there is some crime. 400
Let this be proclaimed.

DOORKEEPER: It shall be proclaimed loudly. [*She exits; reenters.*] The
king's order will be as welcome as rain in the right season.

KING: [*Sighing long and deeply.*] Families without offspring whose
lines of succession are cut off lose their wealth to strangers when 405
the last male heir dies. When I die, this will happen to the wealth
of the Puru dynasty.

DOORKEEPER: Heaven forbid such a fate!

KING: I curse myself for despising the treasure I was offered.

SĀNUMATĪ: He surely has my friend in mind when he blames himself. 410

6. Royal polygamy called for elaborate courtesies.

7. This rite (*pumsavana*) is performed in the third
month of pregnancy.

KING:

I abandoned my lawful wife, the holy ground
where I myself planted my family's glory,
like earth sown with seed at the right time,
ready to bear rich fruit in season.

SĀNUMATĪ: But your family's line will not be broken.

CATURIKĀ: [*In a stage whisper.*] The king is upset by the story of the merchant. Go and bring noble Mādhavya from the Palace of the Clouds to console him!DOORKEEPER: A good idea! [*She exits.*]

KING: Duśyanta's ancestors are imperiled.

Our fathers drink the yearly libation
mixed with my childless tears,
knowing that there is no other son
to offer the sacred funeral waters.

[*He falls into a faint.*]CATURIKĀ: [*Looking at the bewildered KING.*] Calm yourself, my lord!SĀNUMATĪ: Though a light shines, his separation from Śakuntalā keeps him in a state of dark depression. I could make him happy now, but I've heard Indra's consort consoling Śakuntalā with the news that the gods are hungry for their share of the ancestral oblations and will soon conspire to have her husband welcome his lawful wife. I'll have to wait for the auspicious time, but meanwhile I'll cheer my friend by reporting his condition. [*She exits, flying into the air.*]VOICE OFFSTAGE: Help! Brahman-murder!⁸KING: [*Regaining consciousness, listening.*] Is it Mādhavya's cry of pain? Who's there?

DOORKEEPER: King, your friend is in danger. Help him!

KING: Who dares to threaten him?

DOORKEEPER: Some invisible spirit seized him and dragged him to the roof of the Palace of the Clouds.

KING: [*Getting up.*] Not this! Even my house is haunted by spirits.

When I don't even recognize
the blunders I commit every day,
how can I keep track
of where my subjects stray?

VOICE OFFSTAGE: Dear friend! Help! Help!

KING: [*Breaking into a run.*] Friend, don't be afraid! I'm coming!VOICE OFFSTAGE: [*Repeating the call for help.*] Why shouldn't I be afraid? Someone is trying to split my neck in three, like a stalk of sugar cane.KING: [*Casting a glance.*] Quickly, my bow!BOW-BEARER: [*Entering with a bow in hand.*] Here are your bow and quiver.

8. Murder of a brahman is among the most heinous sins.

[*The KING takes his bow and arrows.*]

VOICE OFFSTAGE:

I'll kill you as a tiger kills struggling prey!
I'll drink fresh blood from your tender neck!
Take refuge now in the bow Duśyanta lifts
to calm the fears of the oppressed!

455

KING: [*Angrily.*] How dare you abuse my name? Stop, carrion-eater! Or you will not live! [*He strings his bow.*] Vetravati, lead the way to the stairs!

DOORKEEPER: This way, king.

460

[*All move forward in haste.*]KING: [*Searching around.*] There is no one here!

VOICE OFFSTAGE: Help! Help! I see you. Don't you see me? I'm like a mouse caught by a cat! My life is hopeless!

KING: Don't count on your powers of invisibility! My magical arrows will find you. I aim this arrow:

465

It will strike its doomed target
and spare the brahman it must save—
a wild goose can extract the milk
and leave the water untouched.⁹

[*He aims the arrow. Then Indra's charioteer MĀTALI enters, having released the BUFFOON.*]

MĀTALI: King!

470

Indra sets demons as your targets;
draw your bow against them!
Send friends gracious glances
rather than deadly arrows!

KING: [*Withdrawing his arrow.*] Mātali, welcome to great Indra's charioteer!

475

BUFFOON: [*Entering.*] He tried to slaughter me like a sacrificial beast and this king is greeting him with honors!MĀTALI: [*Smiling.*] Your Majesty, hear why Indra has sent me to you!

KING: I am all attention.

480

MĀTALI: There is an army of demons descended from one-hundred-headed Kālanemi, known to be invincible . . .

KING: I have already heard it from Nārada, the gods' messenger.

MĀTALI:

He is invulnerable to your friend Indra,
so you are appointed to lead the charge—
the moon dispels the darkness of night
since the sun cannot drive it out.

485

Take your weapon, mount Indra's chariot, and prepare for victory!
KING: Indra favors me with this honor. But why did you attack Mādhavya?

490

9. The *hamsa*; in Sanskrit poetry this bird is said to have the ability to separate milk from the water with which it has been diluted.

MĀTALI: I'll tell you! From the signs of anguish Your Majesty showed,
I knew that you were despondent. I attacked him to arouse your
anger.

A fire blazes when fuel is added;
a cobra provoked raises its hood—
men can regain lost courage
if their emotions are aroused.

KING: [*In a stage whisper.*] Dear friend, I cannot disobey a command
from the lord of heaven. Inform my minister Piśuna of this and tell
him this for me:

Concentrate your mind on guarding my subjects!
My bow is strung to accomplish other work.

BUFFOON: Whatever you command!

[*He exits.*]

MĀTALI: Mount the chariot, Your Majesty!

[*The KING mimes mounting the chariot; all exit.*]

Act VII

[*The KING enters with MĀTALI by the skyway, mounted on a chariot.*]

KING: Mātali, though I carried out his command, I feel unworthy of
the honors Indra gave me.

MĀTALI: [*Smiling.*] Your Majesty, neither of you seems satisfied.

You belittle the aid you gave Indra
in face of the honors he conferred,
and he, amazed by your heroic acts,
deems his hospitality too slight.

KING: No, not so! When I was taking leave, he honored me beyond
my heart's desire and shared his throne with me in the presence of
the gods:

Indra gave me a garland of coral flowers¹
tinged with sandalpowder from his chest,
while he smiled at his son Jayanta,
who stood there barely hiding his envy.

MĀTALI: Don't you deserve whatever you want from Indra?

Indra's heaven of pleasures has twice
been saved by rooting out thorny demons—
your smooth-jointed arrows have now done
what Viṣṇu once did with his lion claws.²

KING: Here too Indra's might deserves the praise.

When servants succeed in great tasks,
they act in hope of their master's praise—

1. The coral trees of heaven bear never-fading flowers. 2. In his incarnation as half-man, half-demon the god Viṣṇu slew a demon.

would dawn scatter the darkness
if he were not the sun's own charioteer?

MĀTALI: This attitude suits you well! [*He moves a little distance.*] Look 25
over there, Your Majesty! See how your own glorious fame has
reached the vault of heaven!

Celestial artists are drawing your exploits
on leaves of the wish-granting creeper³
with colors of the nymphs' cosmetic paints, 30
and bards are moved to sing of you in ballads.

KING: Mātali, in my desire to do battle with the demons, I did not
notice the path we took to heaven as we climbed through the sky
yesterday. Which course of the winds are we traveling?

MĀTALI:

They call this path of the wind Parivaha— 35
freed from darkness by Viṣṇu's second stride,
it bears the Gaṅgā's three celestial streams⁴
and turns stars in orbit, dividing their rays.

KING: Mātali, this is why my soul, my senses, and my heart feel calm.
[*He looks at the chariot wheels.*] We've descended to the level of 40
the clouds.

MĀTALI: How do you know?

KING:

Crested cuckoos fly between the spokes,
lightning flashes glint off the horses' coats,
and a fine mist wets your chariot's wheels— 45
all signs that we go over rain-filled clouds.

MĀTALI: In a moment you'll be back in your own domain, Your Maj-
esty.

KING: [*Looking down.*] Our speeding chariot makes the mortal world 50
appear fantastic. Look!

Mountain peaks emerge as the earth descends,
branches spread up from a sea of leaves,
fine lines become great rivers to behold—
the world seems to hurtle toward me.

MĀTALI: You observe well! [*He looks with great reverence.*] The 55
beauty of earth is sublime.

KING: Mātali, what mountain do I see stretching into the eastern and
western seas, rippled with streams of liquid gold, like a gateway of
twilight clouds?

MĀTALI: Your Majesty, it is called the "Golden Peak," the mountain 60
of the demigods, a place where austerities are practiced to perfec-
tion.

3. The *kalpalatā* vine that grows in Indra's heaven. 4. In heaven the Ganges flows with three streams before descending to earth. As the cosmic strider, Viṣṇu scattered the darkness from heaven.

Mārīca, the descendant of Brahmā,
a father of both demons and gods,
lives the life of an ascetic here
in the company of Aditi, his wife.

KING: One must not ignore good fortune! I shall perform the rite of circumambulating the sage.

MĀTALI: An excellent idea!

[*The two mime descending.*]

KING: [*Smiling.*]

The chariot wheels make no sound,
they raise no clouds of dust,
they touch the ground unhindered—
nothing marks the chariot's descent.

MĀTALI: It is because of the extraordinary power that you and Indra both possess.

KING: Mātali, where is Mārīca's hermitage?

MĀTALI: [*Pointing with his hand.*]

Where the sage stands staring at the sun,
as immobile as the trunk of a tree,
his body half-buried in an ant hill,
with a snake skin on his chest,
his throat pricked by a necklace
of withered thorny vines,
wearing a coil of long matted hair
filled with nests of śakunta birds.

KING: I do homage to the sage for his severe austerity.

MĀTALI: [*Pulling hard on the chariot reins.*] Great king, let us enter Mārīca's hermitage, where Aditi nurtures the celestial coral trees.

KING: This tranquil place surpasses heaven. I feel as if I'm bathing in a lake of nectar.

MĀTALI: [*Stopping the chariot.*] Dismount, Your Majesty!

KING: [*Dismounting.*] Mātali, what about you?

MĀTALI: I have stopped the chariot. I'll dismount too. [*He does so.*]

This way, Your Majesty! [*He walks around.*] You can see the grounds of the ascetics' grove ahead.

KING: I am amazed!

In this forest of wish-fulfilling trees
ascetics live on only the air they breathe
and perform their ritual ablutions
in water colored by golden lotus pollen.
They sit in trance on jeweled marble slabs
and stay chaste among celestial nymphs,
practicing austerities in the place
that other seek to win by penances.

MĀTALI: Great men always aspire to rare heights! [*He walks around, calling aloud.*] O venerable Śākalya, what is the sage Mārīca doing now? What do you say? In response to Aditi's question about the

duties of a devoted wife, he is talking in a gathering of great sages' wives.⁵

KING: [*Listening.*] We must wait our turn.

MĀTALI: [*Looking at the KING.*] Your Majesty, rest at the foot of this āśoka tree. Meanwhile, I'll look for a chance to announce you to Indra's father.

KING: As you advise . . . [*He stops.*]

MĀTALI: Your Majesty, I'll attend to this. [*He exits.*]

KING: [*Indicating he feels an omen.*]

I have no hope for my desire.
Why does my arm throb in vain?
Once good fortune is lost,
it becomes constant pain.

VOICE OFFSTAGE: Don't be so wild! Why is his nature so stubborn?

KING: [*Listening.*] Unruly conduct is out of place here. Whom are they reprimanding? [*Looking toward the sound, surprised.*] Who is this child, guarded by two female ascetics? A boy who acts more like a man.

He has dragged this lion cub
from its mother's half-full teat
to play with it, and with his hand
he violently tugs its mane.

[*The BOY enters as described, with two female ascetics.*]

BOY: Open your mouth, lion! I want to count your teeth!

FIRST ASCETIC: Nasty boy, why do you torture creatures we love like our children? You're getting too headstrong! The sages gave you the right name when they called you "Sarvadamana, Tamer-of-everything."

KING: Why is my heart drawn to this child, as if he were my own flesh? I don't have a son. That is why I feel tender toward him . . .

SECOND ASCETIC: The lioness will maul you if you don't let go of her cub!

BOY: [*Smiling.*] Oh, I'm scared to death! [*Pouting.*]

KING:

This child appears to be
the seed of hidden glory,
like a spark of fire
awaiting fuel to burn.

FIRST ASCETIC: Child, let go of the lion cub and I'll give you another toy!

BOY: Where is it? Give it to me! [*He reaches out his hand.*]

KING: Why does he bear the mark of a king who turns the wheel of empire?

A hand with fine webs connecting the fingers
opens as he reaches for the object greedily,

⁵ In Gupta society, the sages were teachers of *dharma* and of the norms of behavior for women of the upper classes.

like a single lotus with faint inner petals
spread open in the red glow of early dawn.

SECOND ASCETIC: Suvratā, you can't stop him with words! The sage
Mārkaṇḍeya's son left a brightly painted clay bird in my hut. Get it
for him!

FIRST ASCETIC: I will! [*She exits.*]

BOY: But until it comes I'll play with this cub.

KING: I am attracted to this pampered boy . . .

Lucky are fathers whose laps give refuge
to the muddy limbs of adoring little sons
when childish smiles show budding teeth
and jumbled sounds make charming words.

SECOND ASCETIC: Well, he ignores me. [*She looks back.*] Is one of the
sage's sons here? [*Looking at the KING.*] Sir, please come here!
Make him loosen his grip and let go of the lion cub! He's tor-
menting it in his cruel child's play.

KING: [*Approaching the BOY, smiling.*] Stop! You're a great sage's son!

When self-control is your duty by birth,
why do you violate the sanctuary laws
and ruin the animals' peaceful life,
like a young black snake in a sandal tree?

SECOND ASCETIC: Sir, he's not a sage's son.

KING: His actions and his looks confirm it. I based my false assumption
on his presence in this place. [*He does what she asked, responding
to the BOY's touch, he speaks to himself.*]

Even my limbs feel delighted
from the touch of a stranger's son—
the father at whose side he grew
must feel pure joy in his heart.

SECOND ASCETIC: [*Examining them both.*] It's amazing! Amazing!

KING: What is it, madam?

SECOND ASCETIC: This boy looks surprisingly like you. He doesn't even
know you, and he's acting naturally.

KING: [*Fondling the child.*] If he's not the son of an ascetic, what
lineage does he belong to?

SECOND ASCETIC: The family of Puru.

KING: [*To himself.*] What? His ancestry is the same as mine . . . so this
lady thinks he resembles me. The family vow of Puru's descendants
is to spend their last days in the forest.

As world protectors they first choose
palaces filled with sensuous pleasures,
but later, their homes are under trees
and one wife shares the ascetic vows.

[*Aloud.*] But mortals cannot enter this realm on their own.

SECOND ASCETIC: You're right, sir. His mother is a nymph's child. She
gave birth to him here in the hermitage of Mārīca.

KING: [*In a stage whisper.*] Here is a second ground for hope! [*Aloud.*]
What famed royal sage claims her as his wife?

SECOND ASCETIC: Who would even think of speaking the name of a
man who rejected his lawful wife?

KING: [*To himself.*] Perhaps this story points to me. What if I ask the
name of the boy's mother? No, it is wrong to ask about another
man's wife. 195

FIRST ASCETIC: [*Returning with a clay bird in her hand.*] Look, Sarva-
damana, a śakunta! Look! Isn't it lovely?

BOY: Where's my mother?

BOTH ASCETICS: He's tricked by the similarity of names.⁶ He wants his
mother. 200

SECOND ASCETIC: Child, she told you to look at the lovely clay śakunta
bird.

KING: [*To himself.*] What? Is his mother's name Śakuntalā? But
names can be the same. Even a name is a mirage . . . a false hope
to herald despair. 205

BOY: I like this bird! [*He picks up the toy.*]

FIRST ASCETIC: [*Looking frantically.*] Oh, I don't see the amulet-box
on his wrist! 210

KING: Don't be alarmed! It broke off while he was tussling with the
lion cub. [*He goes to pick it up.*]

BOTH ASCETICS: Don't touch it! Oh, he's already picked it up! [*With
their hands on their chests, they stare at each other in amazement.*]

KING: Why did you warn me against it?

FIRST ASCETIC: It contains the magical herb called Aparājītā,⁷ honored
sir. Mārīca gave it to him at his birth ceremony. He said that if it
fell to the ground no one but his parents or himself could pick it
up. 215

KING: And if someone else does pick it up?

FIRST ASCETIC: Then it turns into a snake and strikes. 220

KING: Have you two seen it so transformed?

BOTH ASCETICS: Many times.

KING: [*To himself, joyfully.*] Why not rejoice in the fulfillment of my
heart's desire? [*He embraces the child.*]

SECOND ASCETIC: Suvratā, come, let's tell Śakuntalā that her penances
are over. 225

[*Both ascetics exit.*]

BOY: Let me go! I want my mother!

KING: Son, you will greet your mother with me.

BOY: My father is Duṣyanta, not you!

KING: This contradiction confirms the truth. 230

[*ŚAKUNTALĀ enters, wearing the single braid of a woman in
mourning.*]

6. Śakunta, one of the Sanskrit and Prakrit words for "bird," is etymologically related to Śakuntalā (Woman of the Birds), who was so named because she was found in the forest in the company of birds. Now her son, Bharata, mistakes śakunta for śakuntalā. Like the women, the child speaks Prakrit, the "natural" language, but once he has entered the social world of men he must speak Sanskrit.

7. Meaning "invincible" or "unvanquished."

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Even though Sarvadamana's amulet kept its natural form instead of changing into a snake, I can't hope that my destiny will be fulfilled. But maybe what my friend Sānumati reports is right.
KING: [*Looking at ŚAKUNTALĀ.*] It is Śakuntalā!

Wearing dusty gray garments,
her face gaunt from penances,
her bare braid⁸ hanging down—
she bears with perfect virtue
the trial of long separation
my cruelty forced on her.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Seeing the KING pale with suffering.*] He doesn't resemble my noble husband. Whose touch defiles my son when the amulet is protecting him?

BOY: [*Going to his mother.*] Mother, who is this stranger who calls me "son"?

KING: My dear, I see that you recognize me now. Even my cruelty to you is transformed by your grace.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*To herself.*] Heart, be consoled! My cruel fate has finally taken pity on me. It is my noble husband!

KING:

Memory chanced to break my dark delusion
and you stand before me in beauty,
like the moon's wife Rohiṇī
as she rejoins her lord after an eclipse.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Victory to my noble husband!⁹ Vic . . . [*She stops when the word is half-spoken, her throat choked with tears.*]

KING: Beautiful Śakuntalā,

Even choked by your tears,
the word "victory" is my triumph
on your bare pouting lips,
pale-red flowers of your face.

BOY: Mother, who is he?

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Child, ask the powers of fate!

KING: [*Falling at ŚAKUNTALĀ's feet.*]¹

May the pain of my rejection
vanish from your heart;
delusion clouded my weak mind
and darkness obscured good fortune—
a blind man tears off a garland,
fearing the bite of a snake.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: Noble husband, rise! Some crime I had committed in a former life surely came to fruit and made my kind husband indifferent to me.

[*The KING rises.*]

8. A woman separated from her lover neglected her looks and wore her hair in a single braid. 9. The traditional formula for greeting a royal husband. 1. In Sanskrit poetry, the repentant lover, regardless of his rank, must fall at the feet of his beloved, expressing his remorse and asking for her forgiveness.

But how did my noble husband come to remember this woman who was doomed to pain?
KING: I shall tell you after I have removed the last barb of sorrow.

In my delusion I once ignored
a teardrop burning your lip—
let me dry the tear on your lash
to end the pain of remorse!

275

[*He does so.*]

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [*Seeing the signet ring.*] My noble husband, this is the ring!

KING: I regained my memory when the ring was recovered.

280

ŚAKUNTALĀ: When it was lost, I tried in vain to convince my noble husband who I was.

KING: Let the vine take back this flower as a sign of her union with spring.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I don't trust it. Let my noble husband wear it!

285

[*MĀTALI enters.*]

MĀTALI: Good fortune! This meeting with your lawful wife and the sight of your son's face are reasons to rejoice.

KING: The sweet fruit of my desire! Mātali, didn't Indra know about all this?

MĀTALI: What is unknown to the gods? Come Your Majesty! The sage Mārīca grants you an audience.

290

KING: Śakuntalā, hold our son's hand! We shall go to see Mārīca together.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I feel shy about appearing before my elders in my husband's company.

295

KING: But it is customary at a joyous time like this. Come! Come!

[*They all walk around. Then MĀRĪCA enters with ADITI; they sit.*]

MĀRĪCA: [*Looking at the KING.*]

Aditi, this is king Duṣyanta,
who leads Indra's armies in battle;
his bow lets your son's thunderbolt
lie ready with its tip unblunted.

300

ADITI: He bears himself with dignity.

MĀTALI: Your Majesty, the parents of the gods look at you with affection reserved for a son. Approach them!

KING: Mātali, the sages so describe this pair.

Source of the sun's twelve potent forms,
parents of Indra, who rules the triple world,
birthplace of Viṣṇu's primordial form,
sired by Brahmā's sons,² Mārīci and Dakṣa.

305

MĀTALI: Correct!

KING: [*Bowing.*] Indra's servant, Duṣyanta, bows to you both.

310

MĀRĪCA: My son, live long and protect the earth!

2. These references establish Aditi and Mārīca's status as primordial parents of the universe and of the gods themselves.

ADITI: My son, be an invincible warrior!

ŚAKUNTALĀ: I worship at your feet with my son.

MĀRĪCA:

Child, with a husband like Indra
and a son like his son Jayanta,
you need no other blessing.
Be like Indra's wife Paulomī!

ADITI: Child, may your husband honor you and may your child live
long to give both families joy! Be seated!

[All sit near MĀRĪCA.]

MĀRĪCA: [Pointing to each one.]

By the turn of fortune,
virtuous Śakuntalā, her noble son,
and the king are reunited—
faith and wealth with order.

KING: Sir, first came the success of my hopes, then the sight of you.
Your kindness is unparalleled.

First flowers appear, then fruits,
first clouds rise, then rain falls,
but here the chain of events is reversed—
first came success, then your blessing.

MĀTALI: This is the way the creator gods give blessings.

KING: Sir, I married your charge by secret marriage rites. When her
relatives brought her to me after some time, my memory failed and
I sinned against the sage Kaṇva, your kinsman. When I saw the ring,
I remembered that I had married his daughter. This is all so strange!

Like one who doubts the existence
of an elephant who walks in front of him
but feels convinced by seeing footprints,
my mind has taken strange turns.

MĀRĪCA: My son, you need not take the blame. Even your delusion
has another cause. Listen!

KING: I am attentive.

MĀRĪCA: When Menakā took her bewildered daughter from the steps
of the nymph's shrine and brought her to my wife, I knew through
meditation that you had rejected this girl as your lawful wife
because of Durvāsa's curse, and that the curse would end when you
saw the ring.

KING: [Sighing.] So I am freed of blame.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [To herself.] And I am happy to learn that I wasn't
rejected by my husband without cause. But I don't remember being
cursed. Maybe the empty heart of love's separation made me deaf
to the curse . . . my friends did warn me to show the ring to my
husband . . .

MĀRĪCA: My child, I have told you the truth. Don't be angry with your
husband!

You were rejected when the curse
that clouded memory made him cruel,
but now darkness is lifted
and your power is restored—
a shadow has no shape
in a badly tarnished mirror,
but when the surface is clean
it can easily be seen.

KING: Sir, here is the glory of my family! [He takes the child by the
hand.]

MĀRĪCA: Know that he is destined to turn the wheel of your empire!

His chariot will smoothly cross
the ocean's rough waves
and as a mighty warrior
he will conquer the seven continents.
Here he is called Sarvadāmana,
Tamer-of-everything;
later when his burden is the world,
men will call him Bharata, Sustainer.³

KING: Since you performed his birth ceremonies, we can hope for all
this.

ADITI: Sir, let Kaṇva be told that his daughter's hopes have been ful-
filled. Menakā, who loves her daughter, is here in attendance.

ŚAKUNTALĀ: [To herself.] The lady expresses my own desire.

MĀRĪCA: He knows everything already through the power of his aus-
terity.

KING: This is why the sage was not angry at me.

MĀRĪCA: Still, I want to hear his response to this joyful reunion. Who
is there?

DISCIPLE: [Entering.] Sir, it is I.

MĀRĪCA: Gaḷava, fly through the sky and report the joyous reunion
to Kaṇva in my own words: "The curse is ended. Śakuntalā and her
son are embraced by Duṣyanta now that his memory is restored."

DISCIPLE: As you command, sir! [He exits.]

MĀRĪCA: My son, mount your friend Indra's chariot with your wife and
son and return to your royal capital!

KING: As you command, sir!

MĀRĪCA: My son, what other joy can I give you?

KING: There is no greater joy, but if you will:

May the king serve nature's good!
May priests honor the goddess of speech!
And may Siva's dazzling power
destroy my cycle of rebirths!⁴

[All exit.]

3. Bharata is to become the emperor after whom ancient India (*Bhāratavarṣa*) is named. *Seven conti-*
nents: those of the Hindu universe. 4. All Sanskrit plays end with a traditional verse called *bharata-*
śya ("the utterance of [the sage] Bharata"), in which the play's protagonist invokes the blessings of the
gods on himself and the universal order.