

Man in the well

A man is on a journey and comes to a dense forest. The forest is full of carnivorous beasts: ravenous lions, tigers and elephants, more terrible even than death. The man is deeply disturbed, and his hair stands on end. In terror he runs about looking for shelter, trying to escape from the beasts.

As he runs, he realises that the forest is wrapped up in a huge net, and the net is embraced in the arms of a monstrous woman. There is no escape.

Suddenly the floor of the forest gives way and he plunges through some creepers into a concealed well.

His feet become tangled up in the creepers and he is suspended upside down, like an enormous fruit. Looking down he sees that a powerful snake is waiting at the bottom of the well. Looking upwards he sees that a great elephant is slowly circling the edge of the well—an elephant with six blackened mouths and twelve feet.

As he looks, he notices some fearsome bees coming from a tree overhanging the well. In the midst of the tree he sees a stream of honey flowing down towards him. He reaches out to drink it, his thirst for its sweetness overwhelming his fears. With each mouthful he is left unsatisfied and needs more.

Out of the corner of his eye he notices some black and white mice nibbling on the creepers . . .

Despite the great and terrible dangers he is in, the man does not get tired of living or give up hope of life. And there he stays, thrown into the ocean of existence.

*Adapted from Book 11, chapter 5 of the Mahabharata,
from a translation by Dermot Killingley*