

RAMAYANA

Translated by Robert Biggs

PART III

ARANYA-KĀṆḌA

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With love, respect and mutton dosas
— *Sourcebits Family*

RECEPTION OF RĀMA, LAKṢMAṆA AND SĪTĀ BY THE SAGES

Entering the vast forest of Daṇḍakāraṇya, Rāma, who was unassailable and whose mind was under control, saw a group of huts where ascetics resided. Kuśa grass and bark cloth were scattered about. The hermitage was aglow with spiritual effulgence, difficult to look at, shining like the orb of the sun in the sky. It was the refuge of all living beings. The courtyards were always well-swept. The hermitage was crowded with deer and frequented by flocks of birds. It was always revered by beavies of celestial damsels who glorified it through dance. It was beautified by large pavilions for the performance of fire sacrifices which were equipped with the necessary sacrificial ladles, vessels, kuśa grass mats covered with deer skins, fire wood, water, clay pots, and edible fruits and roots. It was surrounded by sacred groves of huge trees with sweet fruits. It was sanctified by the performance of sacrifices and oblations into the sacred fires, and reverberated with the auspicious transcendental sound of the Vedas being recited. Different kinds of flowers, such as lotuses, were scattered about and there were pools filled with lotus flowers. The aged sages who resided there lived solely on fruits and roots and were self-controlled. They wore bark cloth and the skins of black antelopes for clothes and were as effulgent as fire or the sun. The hermitage was enhanced by the presence of holy men who were controlled in their eating and were outstanding sages. It was as glorious as Lord Brahmā's own abode and resounded with the chanting of transcendental mantras. It was further beautified by highly fortunate brāhmaṇas who were knowers of the Absolute.

Seeing the dwellings of the ascetics, Śrī Rāma untied the string of His great bow and entered. When the great sages who had acquired divine knowledge saw Rāma, they happily approached both Him and the glorious Sītā. Seeing Rāma to be like the newly risen moon and a follower of the principles of righteousness, and also seeing Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, the glorious descendant of the Vaidehas, the sages of firm vows welcomed Them with

auspicious ceremonies. The forest dwellers were amazed to see Rāma's bodily beauty, loveliness, youthfulness and attractive attire. The forest dwellers stared at Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa and Rāma with unblinking eyes, considering them wonderful beings. The highly fortunate sages who were engaged in the welfare of all living beings arranged for Rāma to stay there in a hut made of leaves.

Thereafter the dutiful sages, who shone like fire, honored Rāma according to scriptural rule and offered Him water. Performing auspicious rituals with delight, the great souls presented roots, flowers and fruits, and even the whole hermitage. After making this offering, those knowers of duty joined their hands together and said: "Being the protector of righteousness, the shelter of the people, most renowned, worshipable, worthy of respect, the bearer of the rod of chastisement, the preceptor, and the fourth part of Indra, the king is the protector of the citizens, O Rāma. Thus it is that the king is honored by all and enjoys the best of pleasures.

"We, being residents of Your kingdom, deserve to be protected by You. Whether You reside in the city or the forest, You are our king, the lord of the people. O king, having renounced punishment of others, having conquered our anger and our senses, and having no wealth other than austerity, we should always be protected by You, as a fetus is protected by its mother."

After talking in this way, they entertained Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā with fruits, roots, flowers and other enjoyables from the forest. Similarly, other self-realized ascetics who were as effulgent as fire and of just behavior uttered hymns in praise of Lord Rāma.

THE DEMON VIRĀDHA ATTACKS RĀMA, LAKṢMAṆA AND SĪTĀ

Rāma enjoyed the hospitality of all the sages as a guest until sunrise, at which time He took leave of them and entered the forest. Wherever Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa looked in the midst of that forest, They saw many herds of deer gathered, as well as bears and tigers. They saw trees, vines and shrubs that were destroyed, and it was difficult to find any reservoirs of drinking water. The birds did not sing, but the forest resounded with the shrill cry of hordes of crickets. Rāma, along with Sītā, saw among these frightful creatures a man-eating beast as big as a mountain peak who was roaring loudly. He had deep-set eyes, a huge mouth, a hideous body and monstrous belly. He was terrifying, disproportionate, tall, deformed and frightening to see. He wore a tiger skin drenched in fat and splattered with blood. He was causing trouble to all living creatures and, with his mouth wide open, he resembled Yama, the god of death. He had tied to his iron spear the heads of three lions, four tigers, two jackals and ten spotted deer, which were all dripping with fat. His roar produced a loud rumbling sound.

Seeing Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, he became furious and, letting out a terrifying bellow which seemed to shake the earth, he charged toward Them as time, the ultimate destroyer, does toward all living beings. Grabbing up Sītā within his arms, he said: “You two wearing matted hair and bark cloth, in the company of Your wife, bearing in Your hands bows, arrows and swords have reached the end of Your lives by entering the Daṇḍakāraṇya Forest. How is it that You two ascetics are living with a woman? You two sinners, committing unrighteous acts, are a disgrace to the ascetics. I am a rākṣasa named Virādhā and I live in this impenetrable jungle. I go about with my weapons constantly eating the flesh of sages. I shall take this beautiful woman as my wife, and shall drink the blood of You two sinners on the battlefield.”

Hearing the evil and boastful words of the wicked beast Virādhā, Sītā was overwhelmed and began trembling like a banana tree in a strong wind. Seeing the lovely Sītā in the embrace of Virādhā, Rāma, His mouth becoming parched, said to Lakṣmaṇa: “My dear brother! See how the daughter of King Janaka, My own wife of good conduct, is in the embrace of Virādhā! The famous princess was raised in a life of comfort. O Lakṣmaṇa, now Kaikeyī’s desire which was so dear to her, for which she sought a boon, and who was not satisfied with acquiring the kingdom for her son, has suddenly been fulfilled. Today My middle mother, who had Me banished to the forest even though I was dear to all living beings, will see her desire fulfilled. O Lakṣmaṇa, to see Sītā touched by another man is the most painful thing for Me, more so than the death of My father or the loss of sovereignty.”

When Rāma, with tears flowing from His eyes, had finished speaking, Lakṣmaṇa, hissing like a cornered snake, declared: “Why are You lamenting like an orphaned child when You are the Lord of all beings, equal to Indra, and have a servant like Me? Today the earth will definitely drink the blood of the rākṣasa Virādhā killed by an arrow fired by My angry self. The same anger which I vented against Bharata when He desired the throne I shall direct toward Virādhā, as Indra directed his thunderbolt against a mountain. Let the arrow propelled by the strength of My arms strike his huge body, deprive his body of life and knock it down, spinning on the ground.”

RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA ATTACK VIRĀDHA

Then Virādha spoke again, filling the forest with the sound of his voice: “I have asked You two, now You tell Me who You are and where You are going.” Then Rāma told the rākṣasa whose mouth was glowing how He was a descendant of the most glorious Ikṣvāku Dynasty: “Know Us to be warriors dedicated to such activities who have come to the forest. Now We want to know who you are, wandering in this Daṇḍakā Forest.” Virādha then said to Rāma, whose prowess never fails: “Aha! I shall tell You, O king. Listen to me, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. I am in fact the son of Java and my mother is Śatahradā. All the rākṣasas on the earth call me Virādha. By the practice of austerities, I pleased Lord Brahmā and received a boon that I cannot be killed by any weapon in this world, nor cut, nor pierced. Give up this beautiful damsel without any hope of getting Her back. Quickly flee the same way You came! I shall not take Your life.”

His eyes red with anger, Rāma replied as follows to the rākṣasa Virādha, who was ugly and of sinful resolve: “O insignificant scoundrel, cursed be you! Your purpose is vile and you are certainly seeking death. Just wait! You will get your desired death on the battlefield. I shall not let You live.”

Stringing His bow and quickly attaching a sharp arrow to it, Rāma struck the rākṣasa. With His strung bow He shot seven arrows with golden feathers that were equal in speed to Garuḍa or Vāyu. Piercing Virādha’s body, the blood-stained arrows fitted with peacock feathers and shining like

fire, fell on the ground. When he was wounded, the rākṣasa put down Sītā. Taking up his spear, he angrily ran toward Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Roaring loudly and grasping the spear, he resembled the god of death with his gaping mouth. Then the two brothers rained a shower of blazing arrows on that rākṣasa Virādha. The fearsome rākṣasa laughed, then stopped and grimaced. While he was grimacing, the arrows fell off his body. Because of the boon he had received, the rākṣasa Virādha maintained his life airs. Holding up his spear, he charged toward the two descendants of the Raghu Dynasty.

Rāma, being expert in the use of weapons, shot two arrows and cut in two the spear, which resembled a thunderbolt or fire, as it flew through the air. Being split by Rāma's arrows, his spear fell to the earth, like a rocky ledge of Mount Meru shattered by a lightning bolt. The brothers quickly got up with Their swords, like two black snakes, and fell upon him, hitting him with great force. Being badly wounded, the monster grabbed with his arms the two unshakable tigers among men, desiring to run off with Them.

Understanding the rākṣasa's intention, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: "O son of Sumitrā, let the rākṣasa carry Us along this path. Let him carry Us as he wishes. Wherever the night-stalker goes will be Our path, O Lakṣmaṇa." The night-stalker, who was proud of his physical strength, lifted the two up as if They were children and placed them on his shoulders. Holding Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa on his shoulders, the night-stalker Virādha roared fiercely and headed into the jungle. Looking like a huge cloud, he entered the jungle, in which grew many kinds of big trees and which was frequented by flocks of different species of birds, jackals and beasts of prey.

RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA KILL VIRĀDHA

Seeing the two preeminent descendants of the Raghu Dynasty being carried away in the two huge arms of the monster, Sītā began to wail loudly: “Oh, Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha, who is truthful, of good character and pure, is being carried away, along with Lakṣmaṇa, by a rākṣasa with a monstrous form. O best of the rākṣasas, I offer you My respects. I shall surely be eaten by bears, tigers and panthers. Therefore, take Me and release the two descendants of Kakutstha.” Upon hearing Sītā’s entreaty, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa acted with great force to kill the evil wretch. Lakṣmaṇa broke the monster’s left arm and Rāma broke his right arm. With his arms broken and terrified, he suddenly fell on the ground unconscious, like a cloud or mountain shattered by a thunderbolt. While pummeling the rākṣasa with Their fists, arms and feet, They repeatedly lifted him up and threw him on the ground. Although pierced by many arrows, hacked by the two swords and repeatedly crushed on the ground, the rākṣasa did not die.

Seeing that the demon was unkillable and like a mountain, Rāma, who gave protection in danger, spoke these words to Lakṣmaṇa: “O tiger among men, because of the boon received by his penance, this rākṣasa cannot be conquered in battle with any weapon. We shall therefore bury him alive.”

Hearing what Lord Rāma said, the rākṣasa uttered the following polite reply to that best of men Rāma: “O tiger among men, I am killed by You who are as strong as Lord Indra. I did not recognize You earlier because of my illusion. My lad, I know You to be Rāma, the fine son of Kausalyā, and

this is the highly fortunate Sītā, princess of the Vaidehas, and this other, the famous Lakṣmaṇa. I am in fact the gandharva named Tumburu who was cursed by Kuvera to enter the body of a horrible rākṣasa. When I pleaded with him for mercy, he replied: ‘When Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha kills you in conflict, you will return to heaven and regain your original condition.’ Previously, O sinless one, King Kuvera who was very attached to the celestial damsel Rambhā, became very angry when I was unable to attend to her, and so he cursed me. By Your mercy I am freed from this terrible curse. I shall now return to my own abode. Bless You, O conqueror of foes. The righteous and austere sage Śarabhaṅga, who is as effulgent as the sun, lives one and a half yojanas from here. Go to him right away. He will give You good advice. After throwing me in a pit, go happily. This is the ancient tradition for rākṣasas who die. Those who are interred in a pit attain ever-lasting worlds.”

When Virādha, who was pierced with arrows, finished speaking in this way to Rāma, he lay there waiting to be buried so that he could relinquish his body and attain heaven. Then Rāma instructed Lakṣmaṇa: “Dig a very big pit in the forest for this monster the size of an elephant whose activities were so dreadful.” The valiant Rāma then stepped on Virādha by placing His lotus foot on Virādha’s neck. Afterwards, taking a shovel, Lakṣmaṇa dug a large pit at the side of the fortunate Virādha. When Rāma removed His foot, Lakṣmaṇa lifted up Virādha, whose ears were shaped like spikes, and threw him into the pit as Virādha roared most fiercely.

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, who were quick in prowess on the battlefield, were joyful as They forcefully threw the fierce, terrified and roaring rākṣasa into the pit. Seeing that the great demon Virādha could not be killed by any sharp weapon, the two best of men, being very crafty, killed him the only way possible—by burying him in a pit. Actually, it was Virādha’s own desire

that Rāma forcibly kill him. That is why the forest creature himself had declared: “I cannot be killed by any weapon.” When Rāma heard this statement, He decided to bury Virādha alive. As the rākṣasa was being thrown with great force into the pit, his bellowing resounded throughout the forest. With great delight Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa threw Virādha into the pit in the ground. Covering the rākṣasa with stones, They were jubilant and free from fear in the great wilderness. After killing the rākṣasa and retrieving Sītā, the two princes moved about with Their splendid golden bows in the deep forest like the sun and moon in the sky.

RĀMA, LAKṢMAṆA AND SĪTĀ VISIT THE SAGE ŚARABHAṄGA

After killing the rākṣasa Virādha in the forest and embracing and consoling Sītā, the valiant Rāma said to His brother Lakṣmaṇa, who was glowing with splendor: “This forest is very troublesome and inaccessible and We are inexperienced in living here. Let Us quickly go to Śarabhaṅga’s hermitage.” It is said that Rāma and the others then approached the hermitage of the sage Śarabhaṅga, who was as effulgent as a demigod and self-realized through the practice of austerities. Nearby the sage Śarabhaṅga They saw an amazing sight. There, seated on a most excellent chariot in the sky, was Indra, the lord of the gods, whose radiant body was as brilliant as fire or the sun. His chariot did not touch the ground and he was followed by the demigods who are fully perceptive. There were also many other great personalities similar to Indra who were worshiping him. Not far away, Rāma saw Indra’s chariot drawn by tawny horses situated in the sky, which was as bright as the newly risen sun. He saw that the chariot had a spotless canopy as white as a cloud, as brilliant as the orb of the moon and that it was decorated with beautiful garlands of flowers. Two lovely women were waving two yak-tail whisks with costly golden handles over the head of Indra. Gandharvas, the immortal gods, perfected beings, and many great sages were praising with choice words the demigod Indra as he talked with the sage Śarabhaṅga.

Seeing Indra’s chariot, Rāma pointed out the wonderful sight to His brother Lakṣmaṇa and said: “O Lakṣmaṇa, look at that amazing chariot in the sky! It is shining as brightly as the sun, is endowed with great splendor

and is being served by heavenly beings. Previously We had heard about the horses of Indra, who takes the foremost seat in sacrifices. Here indeed are those celestial horses present in the sky. O tiger among men, on both sides of the chariot are standing hundreds of young men wearing golden earrings and carrying swords in their hands. They are broad-chested and have arms as strong as steel. They are all wearing red clothes and are as difficult to conquer as a tiger. On their chests hang golden necklaces that shine like fire. Their bodies appear no older than twenty-five years. O Lakṣmaṇa, wait here for a while with Sītā. So far I have not been able to discern who that effulgent person on the chariot is.”

After instructing Lakṣmaṇa to wait, Rāma approached the hermitage of the sage Śarabhaṅga. When Indra, the husband of Śacī, saw that Lord Rāma was drawing near, he took leave of Śarabhaṅga and said the following to the demigods: “Here comes Lord Rāma. He should not yet talk with me. Before He arrives we should go elsewhere. He should not see me yet. He has a task to perform which is impossible for anyone else. When He has accomplish His task of defeating Rāvaṇa, I shall then quickly go to see Him.”

Then Indra, the bearer of the thunderbolt, offered his respects to the ascetic Śarabhaṅga and, taking leave from him, departed in his chariot pulled by fine steeds. As Indra was leaving, Rāma and His associates reached the sage Śarabhaṅga who was seated near a sacrificial fire. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā touched the sage’s feet and with his permission sat down. He invited Them to stay as his guests.

Thereafter Rāma inquired about Indra’s chariot. Śarabhaṅga explained everything that Rāma requested: “O Rāma, Indra, the bestower of boons, wishes to take me to Brahmaloka. This was achieved by me through

the execution of severe austerities. This is nigh impossible for those who have not mastered their own senses and mind. Knowing You to be present nearby, I did not want to go to Brahmāloka without having You as my dear guest. O tiger among men, now that I have met You, a righteous and great soul, I shall ascend to the spiritual realm served by liberated beings. I have earned auspicious and enduring worlds—the heavenly realms and the abode of Lord Brahmā. Please accept them from me.”

After the sage Śarabhaṅga finished speaking, Rāma, who is well-versed in the scriptures, replied as follows: “I shall indeed accept all those worlds, O great sage. But for now I wish that you indicate a place where I can stay in the forest.” Being questioned by Rāma, who was equal to Lord Indra, the highly intelligent Śarabhaṅga replied in the following way: “O Rāma, here in the forest dwells a very powerful and righteous sage practicing self-control named Sutīkṣṇa. He can help You. Go to that holy region of the forest where the ascetic Sutīkṣṇa dwells. He will arrange a place for You to stay in a nice part of the forest. Follow upstream this Maṇḍākinī River, which has boats plying it like floating flowers. This is the path, O tiger among men. Now, look at me, my son, while I abandon my body, as a snake discards its skin.”

Then the powerful sage lit a fire and offered into it oblations of clarified butter in accordance with scriptural regulations, after which he entered into the flames. The fire reduced to ashes the hair, old skin, bones, flesh and blood of the great soul, and he assumed the form of a youth as radiant as fire. Rising out of the mass of flames, Śarabhaṅga shone brightly. He crossed beyond the worlds of the performers of fire sacrifices, of the great sages and of the demigods and rose up to the spiritual world. By his pious activities that best of brāhmaṇas was able to see the primeval grandsire

of all living beings surrounded by His eternal attendants. The Supreme Lord was also very pleased to see the brāhmaṇa and welcomed him, so it is said.

THE SAGES REQUEST RĀMA FOR PROTECTION FROM RĀKṢASAS

After Śarabhaṅga achieved the spiritual world, the sages who were assembled there approached Rāma, who was glowing radiantly. Among them were Vaikhānasas, Vālikhilyas, Samprakṣālas, Marīcipas, numerous Āsmakutṭas, Patrāhāras, Dantolūkhalīs, Unmajjakas, Gātraśayyas, Aśayyas, Anavakāśikas, Salilāhāras, Vāyubhakṣas, ākāśanilayas, Sthaṇḍilaśāyīs, Ūrdhvavāsīs, Dāntas, ārdrapaṭavāsās, Sajapas, Taponiṣṭhas and Pañcāgnisevīs. They were all endowed with spiritual luster and by their rigid practice of yoga, had achieved keen mental concentration.

All these ascetics in Śarabhaṅga's hermitage approached Lord Rāma, the supreme knower of and principal upholder of righteousness, and said: "You are the greatest warrior in this world, being a descendant of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty. You are also the Supreme Lord and protector of living beings, as is Indra among the demigods. Your fame and prowess are well-known throughout the three worlds. You have complete dedication to Your father's request, as well as truthfulness and righteousness. O Lord! We approach You, a great soul dedicated to duty and well-conversant with how to execute it, to make a request. Please forgive us for that. It would be a great injustice indeed if the king, after collecting as taxes the sixth part of the citizens income, did not give them protection, as a father protects a son. A king who always looks after all the residents of his kingdom as if they were his own life or as if they were his own children as dear to him as his life, attains glory lasting many years. Attaining the realm of Lord Brahmā, he achieves even greater glory there. Whatever result accrues to a sage living on

roots and fruits who observes the highest principles of religion, one fourth of that goes to the king who protects the citizens with righteousness.

“O Rāma, there are very advanced ascetics living here in the forest, and among them are many brāhmaṇas. Although we have accepted You as our Lord, we are practically being exterminated by rākṣasas. Come and see the bodies of self-realized sages who were killed in the forest in various ways by the fearsome rākṣasas. They are committing terrible atrocities against those who dwell on the shore of Lake Pampā, along the banks of the Maṇḍākinī River and at Mount Citrakūṭa. Thus we are unable to endure this persecution of the ascetics in this forest, which is being perpetrated by rākṣasas whose activities are horrendous. Therefore we have come to You for shelter. O Rāma, please protect us by killing those night-stalkers! There is no greater recourse for us in this world than You. O prince, please protect us from all those rākṣasas.”

Hearing this entreaty from the ascetics who were engaged in the practice of penance, the righteous soul Rāma replied to them as follows: “You should not speak to Me in this way. I am at the command of the ascetics. The only reason for which I have entered this forest is to do My duty. I have entered this forest on the behest of my father just to stop the rākṣasas from annihilating you. By good luck I have come to help you achieve your goals. Thus My stay in this forest will be greatly successful. I wish to kill in battle the rākṣasas who are the enemies of the ascetics. O ascetics, just see My valor and that of My brother!”

After offering the ascetics this boon, Rāma, who was steadfast in the observance of duty and accustomed to being respectful, headed for the hermitage of Sutikṣṇa, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa, Sitā and all the ascetics.

RĀMA REACHES SUTĪKṢṢṢA'S HERMITAGE

Rāma, the subduer of foes, along with Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā and the brāhmaṇas, went to the hermitage of Sutīkṣṣa. After going a long distance and crossing the deep waters of the Maṇḍākinī River, They saw a spotless mountain peak that was as high as Mount Meru. Further ahead the two descendants of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, accompanied by Sītā, entered a forest that was full of many different kinds of trees. In one corner of the formidable forest, which had trees with many kinds of flowers and fruits, They saw a hermitage decorated with bark cloth and flower garlands. Rāma spoke with due respect to the sage Sutīkṣṣa, who was sitting in meditation, his body being soiled with earth and his hair being matted: “O honorable one, I am Rāma, and I have come to see you. O sage, you are conversant with righteousness. Please reply to Me. Your prowess is unassailable.”

The self-composed sage opened his eyes and, seeing Rāma, the best of those who uphold righteousness, embraced Him with his arms and said: “Welcome to You, O Rāma, the best of the Raghu Dynasty! You are the best of those who support truthfulness. With Your arrival this hermitage is as if it has found its master. I have not given up my body in this world to ascend to the world of the gods because I was waiting for You of great renown. Lord Indra visited me here and informed me that You lost Your kingdom and were residing at Mount Citrakūṭa. That great deity Indra, the lord of the gods, also informed me that I had by my pious deeds achieved all the auspicious worlds. In those realms wherein dwell godly sages and which I have achieved by my austerity You can stay by my mercy with Your wife Sītā and Your brother Lakṣmaṇa.”

Rāma spoke to the sage, who was resplendent because of his austerities and ever-truthful, as Lord Brahmā speaks to Indra: “O great sage, I shall personally bring all those worlds within your reach. But I wish that you inform Me where I can reside in this forest. The great soul Śarabhaṅga

of the Gautama Dynasty told Me that you are expert in all affairs and engaged in the welfare of all living beings.”

Being addressed in this way by Rāma, the great sage, who was famous throughout the world, replied with sweet words and great joy: “O Rāma, this hermitage, which is frequented by groups of sages and always supplied with roots and fruits, is comfortable. Please stay here. Large herds of deer come to this hermitage fearlessly and, without harming anyone, leave after captivating everyone’s minds. You may know that there is no other disturbance here than the deer.”

Upon hearing the great sage’s words, Rāma somberly clenched His bow and arrows and said: “O most fortunate one, if when the deer herd comes, I kill them with a razor-sharp arrow with knobby joints, you would feel slighted. What could be more painful than that? Therefore I cannot stay very long in this hermitage.”

After saying this, Rāma was silent and went to perform the rites of worship during the evening twilight. After finishing the evening worship, Rāma resided there in the enjoyable hermitage of Sutīkṣṇa along with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. Seeing that twilight was over and that night had fallen, the great soul Sutīkṣṇa personally entertained his guests, offering Them wholesome food fit for ascetics.

RĀMA, LAKṢMAṆA AND SĪTĀ TAKE LEAVE OF SUTĪKṢṆA

After being entertained by Sutīkṣṇa, Rāma and the others passed the night there and then got up in the morning. Rising at the proper time, Rāma, along with Sītā, bathed in cool water scented with the fragrance of lotus flowers. Then, when the appropriate time arrived, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā offered oblations into the sacred fire at the hermitage in the forest and offered worship to the gods according to scriptural rule. Seeing the sunrise, these sinless ones went to Sutīkṣṇa and uttered these sweet words: “O lord, We have had a comfortable stay, being honored by Your Holiness. Please give Us permission to leave. These sages are urging Us to hurry. We too are in a hurry to see all the hermitages of the saintly ascetics residing in the Daṇḍakā Forest. We wish to take leave of you, as well as all these foremost ascetics who are always engaged in the observance of duty, penance and self-restraint and who resemble smokeless fire. We wish to leave before the sun’s heat becomes as unbearable as a low-class fellow who acquires wealth by crooked means.”

When He finished speaking, Rāma, along with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, bowed down at the feet of the sage. Lifting up the two princes as They touched his feet, the sage embraced Them tightly and said with affection: “O Rāma, continue on Your journey safely, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa, the son of Sumitrā, and this Sītā who is following You like a shadow. See the pleasant hermitages of ascetics who have purified minds through the practice of austerities while residing in the Daṇḍakāranya Forest. You will see forests abloom with flowers and abundant with fruits and edible roots, and herds of fine deer and peaceful flocks of birds. You will also see lakes with enjoyable waters with clusters of blooming lotus flowers and ducks flocking in the water and on the shores. There also are mountain springs pleasing to the eye and charming forests resounding with the cries of peacocks. Go, my dear

lad! Lakṣmaṇa, You should also go. After seeing all those things, You should come back again to this hermitage.”

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa then said, “So be it.” Circumambulating clockwise around the sage, They began their journey. Thereafter the broad-eyed Sītā gave the brothers excellent bows, quivers and spotless swords. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa fastened Their quivers and twanged Their bows as They grasped them in preparation for leaving the hermitage. With the sage’s permission, the two handsome princes of the Raghu Dynasty, carrying Their bows and swords and accompanied by Sītā, quickly left.

SĪTĀ REQUESTS RĀMA TO PRACTICE NONVIOLENCE

After leaving with the sage's permission, Sītā spoke the following tender words to Her husband Rāma: "In a subtle way, a great man can be led to unrighteousness. But if one eschews addictions born from material desire in this world, he can avoid this. In this world there are three addictions born from desire. The first is speaking falsely. But greater than that are two others—union with another's wife and cruelty to others without cause. O Rāma, You have never had, nor will You ever have the fault of speaking falsely. How could You desire another's wife since this is opposed to righteousness? You do not have such a desire, O Lord of men, nor have You ever had it. It has never even entered Your mind. And You are always devoted to Your own wife, O prince. Both righteousness and truthfulness are established in You. You are upright, true to Your word and obedient to Your father. O strong-armed one, all these can be enjoyed by one who has conquered the senses. I know that You have Your senses under control, O handsome one.

"But this third evil—to take the life of other living beings without due cause for enmity because of illusion—is now facing You. O hero, You have taken a vow to kill the rākṣasas in battle for the protection of the sages living in the Daṇḍakā Forest. For this purpose You have set out with bow and arrows accompanied by Your brother to the forest known as Daṇḍakā. Therefore, seeing You go, My mind is overwhelmed with anxiety, thinking about Your behavior and Your ultimate good and well-being. I do not like that You are going to the Daṇḍakā Forest. I shall tell You the reason why, just listen.

"When You go to the forest with bow and arrows in hand in the company of Your brother, seeing all the forest creatures, You may perhaps at some time shoot an arrow. By the proximity of a bow to a warrior and of firewood to a fire, these become more powerful. In the past there was a truthful and pure ascetic living in a holy forest inhabited by happy deer and

birds. In order to obstruct his advancement in penance, Indra came to his hermitage in the guise of a young warrior riding a chariot and holding a sword in his hand. Placing the excellent sword in the vicinity of the hermitage, he entrusted it to the sage engaged in pious acts of penance. Having received that sword and always remembering his responsibility to guard it, whenever he wandered into the forest, he brought the sword with him. He did not even go to gather edible roots and fruits without the sword, mindful as he was of his responsibility. By always carrying the sword around, the ascetic's mind gradually became cruel. By engaging in acts of cruelty, he became bewildered and drawn into unrighteousness and went to hell. This is what happened in the past by association with a weapon. It is said that association with a weapon has the same result as association with fire.

“Out of affection and deep respect I am making You aware of this story. And I am advising You that while carrying Your bow, You should never kill any rākṣasa in the Daṇḍakā Forest who is not inimical. The whole world considers it bad to kill another without cause. The only reason why heroic and self-controlled warriors carry bows in the forest is to protect those who are in difficulty. What does forest life have to do with carrying weapons? What do the duties of a warrior have to do with the practice of penance? The two are contradictory. Let Us honor the customs of this region. O noble one, when one has contact with a weapon, one's intelligence becomes polluted. When You return to Ayodhyā, You can observe the duties of a warrior. It would give My mother and father-in-laws tremendous delight if after renouncing the kingdom You became a self-controlled ascetic.

“From righteousness comes wealth; from righteousness comes happiness; by righteousness everything is achieved; righteousness is the essence of this world. Righteousness is achieved by those wise persons who emaciate themselves by practicing self-restraint with great effort. Righteousness is not achieved easily. Keeping Your mind always pure, My dear, observe righteousness in a forest suitable for penance. Indeed, everything in the three worlds is already known to You. I have spoken this because of My female fickleness. Who is there who can teach righteousness to You? After thinking this over intelligently with Your younger brother, do as You please without any further delay.”

RĀMA REITERATES HIS COMMITMENT TO PROTECT THE SAGES

Hearing what Sitā said out of devotion to her husband, Rāma, being steadfast in duty, replied to her: “My lady, because of Your affection for Me, You have spoken such beneficial words. O daughter of King Janaka, as You are conversant with the execution of duty, You are capable of instructing warriors in this regard. What is My answer to You? The very words which You have spoken, that a warrior carries a bow so that no one should have to cry out in despair. The sages who are practicing difficult penances in the Daṇḍakā Forest personally came to Me in distress and took shelter of Me who can give them shelter. While living in the forest eating roots and fruits, they are unable to achieve any happiness because of the vicious deeds perpetrated by the rākṣasas. They are being eaten by the fierce rākṣasas who live on human flesh. Being devoured by those rākṣasas, the sages dwelling in Daṇḍakāraṇya implored Me to be merciful to them. Hearing the words sprung from their mouths and being inclined to heed their pleading, I spoke the following: ‘Be pleased with Me. It is indeed very embarrassing that such unequalled brāhmaṇas as yourselves have approached Me when I should be approaching you to serve you.’ I then asked those brāhmaṇas what I should do.

“Gathering together, they made the following petition: ‘O Rāma, we have been tormented by rākṣasas who can assume any form at will in the Daṇḍakā Forest. Therefore, please protect us. When it is time to offer oblations into the sacred fire during our holy celebrations, these unassailable rākṣasas attack us. Because of being attacked by the rākṣasas, we have been looking for some shelter. There is no greater shelter for us than You. Although we have the capability of killing the night-stalkers by virtue of the power accumulated from our austerities, we do not want to waste the result of our austerities gained after a long time. O Rāma, penances are always difficult to perform and fraught with obstacles. Therefore, despite being

eaten by rākṣasas, we do not utter any curses. With the help of Your brother, protect us residents of the Daṇḍakā Forest who are being assailed by the rākṣasas. You indeed are our Lord in this forest.’

“After hearing their plea, O Sītā, I promised the complete protection of all sages in Daṇḍakāraṇya. Having made that promise to the sages, as long as I am alive, I cannot do otherwise. Truthfulness is always most dear to Me. I could even give up My life, or You, Sītā, or Lakṣmaṇa, but not a promise which I have specifically made to brāhmaṇas. I am as such bound to give the sages protection, even if they had not asked, and even more so when a promise has been made. You have spoken as You have out of affection and love for Me. I am thoroughly pleased, O Sītā, for one is not advised unless one is dear. This is befitting You and Your family, O lovely woman. Being My companion in the execution of My duties, You are dearer to Me than My own life.”

After speaking these words to His dearest Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, the great soul Rāma, the wielder of a bow, headed with Lakṣmaṇa for the charming forests inhabited by ascetics practicing austerities.

THE STORY OF THE SAGE MĀṆḌAKARṆI AT PAÑCĀPSARA LAKE

Rāma walked in front, the lovely Sītā in the middle and Lakṣmaṇa followed up in the rear, carrying His bow. The two brothers, in the company of Sītā, went on to see many different mountain peaks, forests and charming rivers. They also saw cranes and ruddy geese strolling on the sandy banks of rivers, and lakes filled with lotus flowers and water fowl. There were herds of spotted deer, long-horned water buffaloes in rut, wild boars and elephants that could topple trees. After going a long distance, as the sun was setting, They saw a delightful lake covering one yojana. It was full of red and white lotus flowers, adorned with herds of wild elephants, and its waters were crowded with flocks of swans and other aquatic birds. In the clear waters of that lake could be heard the sound of musical instruments, though no one could be seen.

Then, out of curiosity, Rāma and the great chariot warrior Lakṣmaṇa began to question the sage Dharmabhṛt, who had been accompanying Them: “O great sage, hearing this amazing sound of music, We are all curious as to where it is coming from. O holy man, please tell Us.” Being questioned in this way by Rāma, the righteous sage immediately began describing the glories of that lake:

“This, O Rāma, is Lake Pañcāpsara, always full with crystal-clear water, which was created by the sage Māṇḍakarṇi through his execution of penances. Māṇḍakarṇi in fact performed severe austerities for ten thousand years standing in water up to his neck and living on air alone. Thereafter all the gods headed by Agni gathered together and began discussing among themselves: ‘This sage is seeking the position of one of us.’ Thus all the residents of heaven became very anxious. To interrupt his austerities, the demigods chose five principal celestial damsels whose bodies were as effulgent as lightning. The sage, who knew what was good and bad, was drawn under the sway of love by those celestial damsels, thus fulfilling the

purpose of the demigods. Those same five celestial damsels became the sage's wives. He built a house for them inside the lake. Dwelling there as they please, the five celestial damsels delight the sage, who regained his youth by the practice of regulated penance. That pleasurable sound of music which You hear is from them playing instruments for their amusement, mixed with the tinkling of their ornaments.”

The greatly celebrated Lord Rāma, along with His brother, accepted the words of the self-realized sage as a marvel. As the sage finished speaking, Rāma saw a group of cottages forming a hermitage. Clothes made from kuśa grass and bark cloth were hanging here and there, and everything was illuminated by a spiritual glow. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā then entered that group of splendid hermitic cottages, staying there comfortably and enjoying the hospitality of the great sages. One after another He visited the hermitages of the ascetics, even those in which He had previously stayed. They sojourned someplace for ten months, another place a year, somewhere else four, five, six or more months, somewhere half a month, three months and eight months. In this way, while staying in the hermitages of the sages, They enjoyed Themselves accordingly as ten years passed. Wandering from place to place, They again came upon the hermitage of Sutīkṣṇa. Reaching that hermitage, Rāma, the crusher of foes, stayed there for some time, being entertained by the sages. Then, on one occasion, while sitting humbly beside the great sage Sutīkṣṇa, Rāma said to him:

“Your Holiness, I have heard from others while talking among themselves that the best of sages Agastya resides in this forest. But because of the vastness of this forest, I do not know in what place. Where is that pleasant hermitage of the wise and honorable sage? I have an intense desire in My heart to offer him My respects along with My younger brother and Sītā, and thus get his mercy. I wish to personally render some service to the sage.”

When the sage Sutīkṣṇa heard what the righteous Rāma had said, he was very pleased and replied: “O Rāma, descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, I also wanted to tell You the same thing, that You should go with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā to see Agastya. Fortunately You Yourself are now telling me this. Now I shall tell You where the great sage Agastya lives. Go four

yojanas south of this hermitage. In an almost flat area of the forest is the hermitage of the highly glorious brother of Agastya. It is adorned with pippalī trees, abundant with fruits and flowers, and resounds with the singing of different birds. There are numerous lotus ponds and reservoirs of clear water crowded with swans, ducks and ruddy geese. Staying there for one night, O Rāma, You should leave in the morning by heading south along the side of the grove. After travelling a distance of one yojana, You will reach the place where Agastya's hermitage is. It is a charming part of the forest beautified by the multitude of trees. There Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa will enjoy with You, for that is a beautiful forested region. If You have decided to see the great sage Agastya, then be pleased to leave this very day, O highly intelligent one.”

After hearing the sage's directions, Rāma and His brother bowed to the sage and, together with Sītā, started for the hermitage of Agastya. They saw many types of forests, mountains resembling masses of clouds, lakes and streams along the way. Having journeyed comfortably along the path indicated by Sūtīkṣṇa, Rāma said with extreme pleasure to Lakṣmaṇa: “This seems to be the hermitage of that great-souled brother of the sage Agastya. The thousands of trees in this forest are laden down with fruits and flowers, just as We were told. The fragrance of ripe pippalī fruit being carried from the forest by a breeze is leaving a sudden pungent taste in the mouth. Here and there are seen heaps of firewood and piles of kuśa grass the color of vaidurya gem. And there in the middle of the forest is seen a column of smoke resembling the top of a black cloud and which is coming from a fire in a hermitage. Having taken their baths at holy bathing ghāṭas, the brāhmaṇas are making offerings of flowers which they themselves have picked. Therefore, My dear brother, according to what I heard from Sūtīkṣṇa, this must be the hermitage of the brother of Agastya. Desiring the well-being of the people, Agastya of pious deeds killed some rākṣasas and thus gave shelter to this southern region.

“Once two brothers—Vātāpi and Ilvala—resided here together. They were great demons, cruel and killers of brāhmaṇas. Assuming the form of a brāhmaṇa, Ilvala would invite the twice-born brāhmaṇas for a śrāddha meal, speaking to them in Sanskrit. Vātāpi used to assume the form of a ram and Ilvala would then cook him, feeding him to the brāhmaṇas according to

the procedures recommend for the śrāddha rite. After those brāhmaṇas had finished their meal, Ilvala would then call out in a loud voice: ‘O Vātāpi, come out!’ Upon hearing his brother’s words, Vātāpi would bleat like a ram and come tearing out of those brāhmaṇas’ bodies, reassembling himself in his original form. Doing this regularly, those man-eaters, who could assume any form at will, killed thousands of brāhmaṇas. At the request of the gods, the great sage Agastya attended the demon’s śrāddha rite and ate their meal. After saying, ‘The meal is finished,’ and offering the sage water for washing the hands, Ilvala called to his brother: ‘Come out!’ As he was speaking to his brother, a murderer of brāhmaṇas, the wise and topmost of sages Agastya replied as he laughed: ‘What power does your brother, who had assumed the form of a ram, have to come out? Being digested by me, he has gone to the court of the lord of death.’ When Ilvala heard about the death of his brother, the night-stalker began to attack the sage. Falling upon that lord of sages, he was burnt by the fiery glance of the sage, who was blazing with splendor, and died. This is the hermitage, beautified by lakes and groves of trees, which belongs to the brother of that sage who performed this difficult task out of compassion for the brāhmaṇas.

As Rāma was talking to Lakṣmaṇa, the sun began to set and the time arrived for the ritual worship performed at twilight. Having finished His evening worship along with His brother in accordance with the mandates of scripture, He entered the hermitage and greeted the sage. Being fully entertained by the sage, Rāma spent one night there dining on roots and fruits. When the night had passed and the sun had risen, Rāma took leave of Agastya’s brother: “I bow before you, Your Holiness. I passed the night comfortably and now am taking leave of you. I shall go to see your revered elder brother.” The sage told Him: “You may go.” Rāma then departed along the path indicated to Him. In that forest Rāma saw hundreds of kinds of trees—nīvāra, panasa, sāla, vañjula, tiniśa, cirivilva, madhuka, vilva and tinduka. These were all in bloom and were beautified by flowering vines. Their branches were twisted by the trunks of elephants and adorned with monkeys. The trees resounded with the sound of hundreds of flocks of birds in rut.

Then the lotus-eyed Rāma said to His brother who was following closely behind: “From the glossy leaves of the trees and the docile nature of

the birds and animals, it appears that the hermitage of the great sage must not be far. One can see there the hermitage of the sage who by his deeds became known in this world as Agastya. His hermitage relieves the exhaustion of all those who are tired. There is a billowing cloud of smoke rising from the oblations of clarified butter offered into the sacred fire. The hermitage is adorned with bark cloth and garlands of flowers, frequented by herds of peaceful deer and resonating with the singing of different kinds of birds. For the benefit of everyone, the pious sage became death personified and forcibly subdued the rākṣasas, making the southern region safe. This is the hermitage of that sage by whose power this southern region is protected so that the rākṣasas are unable to enjoy it. As soon as the sage of pious deeds set foot in this region, the night-stalkers became peaceful and free from enmity.

“This southern region has become known in the three worlds by the name of the holy sage and is unassailable by those who perform heartless acts. In obedience to his order, the Vindhya Mountains are not rising in order not to block the path of the sun. This is Agastya’s hermitage which is attended by mannerly people. He is long-lived and his activities are well-known throughout the world. Here is that holy man, adored by the world, who is engaged in the welfare of the pious. He will surely bestow a blessing upon Us who have come to him. I shall worship the great sage Agastya and stay here for the rest of My exile in the forest.

“Here gods, gandharvas, perfected beings and the topmost sages always serve Agastya who controls his own eating very strictly. The sage is so powerful that if one is a liar, cruel, a rascal, merciless or lusty, one cannot stay. Demigods, yakṣas, nāgas and birds reside in this place, controlling their eating to achieve piety. Here those great souls who have achieved perfection, on giving up their old bodies, achieve new, celestial bodies and ascend to the heavenly world in aerial ships as brilliant as the sun. The demigods confer the status of a yakṣa or different kingdoms or immortality on those good people who worship them here. O Lakṣmaṇa, We have reached the hermitage. Go ahead and tell the sage that I have arrived with Sītā.”

RĀMA AND THE OTHERS ENTER AGASTYA'S HERMITAGE

Lakṣmaṇa entered the hermitage, approached a disciple of Agastya and said: “There was a king named Daśaratha. His powerful and eldest son Rāma, along with His wife Sītā, has come to see the sage. If by chance you may have heard, I am His younger brother named Lakṣmaṇa, favorably engaged in Rāma’s service and devoted to Him. By the command of Our father We have entered a dreadful forest. Please inform the sage that We all wish to see him.”

Hearing Lakṣmaṇa’s request, the disciple said, “All right.” He entered the fire sanctuary to inform the sage. With folded hands, the dear disciple informed the ascetic Agastya, who was unassailable by dint of his austerities, about the arrival of Rāma exactly as requested by Lakṣmaṇa: “The two sons of King Daśaratha—Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa—have entered the compound of this hermitage along with the former’s wife, Sītā. Those two subduers of enemies have come to see Your Holiness to render you some service. Please command me as to what should be done next.”

Hearing from his disciple that Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the most fortunate Sītā had arrived, he said: “By good luck after a long time Rāma has come to see me. My heart has also longed for His visit. You may respectfully tell Rāma to come with His wife and Lakṣmaṇa. Why was He not allowed to come before me?” After being instructed in this way by the great sage who was conversant with dutifulness, the disciple bowed with folded hands and said: “So be it.” Quickly coming out, the disciple said to Lakṣmaṇa, “Where is Rāma? Let Him go to see the sage.”

Going to the entrance of the compound with the disciple, Lakṣmaṇa pointed out Rāma, the descendant of Kakutstha, and Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka. Informing Rāma of what Agastya had told him, the

disciple respectfully ushered Rāma into the compound of the hermitage. Upon entering, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā saw herds of peaceful deer wandering about the compound. They saw shrines for Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Śiva, Indra, Vivasvān, Soma, Bhaga, Kuvera, Dhātā, Vidhātā, Vāyu, Varuna, Gāyatrī, the Vasus, Garuḍa, Kārtikeya and Dharma. Then, surrounded by his disciples, the sage came out of his cottage. Rāma saw Agastya standing before the ascetics of brilliant luster. The heroic Rāma spoke the following words to Lakṣmaṇa: “O Lakṣmaṇa, the holy sage Agastya is coming out. By his effulgence I can recognize that he is a treasure-house of penance.” The strong-armed Rāma then came before the sage who was as brilliant as the sun and touched his feet. After bowing down before the sage, Rāma stood with joined palms, accompanied by Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. The sage greeted Rāma, offered Him water for washing the hands and feet, inquired about His health and then requested Him to sit upon a seat which he presented. When the sages finished offering oblations into the sacred fire, he offered Them ceremonial water for rinsing the hands and then served Them food prepared according to the custom of ascetics living in the forest.

The chief of sages sat down first, and, being a knower of duty, said to Rāma who sat with joined palms out of respect: “An ascetic must offer oblations into the sacred fire, offer water to guests and entertain them in various ways. One who behaves otherwise, O descendant of Kakutstha, will, like a false witness, have to eat his own flesh in the afterworld. Now You, the king of the whole world, observant in Your duties, a great chariot fighter, honorable and respectable, have come as my dear guest.”

Saying this, Agastya honored Rāma as he desired with fruits, roots, flowers and other things and then said to Him: “Here, O tiger among men, is the huge bow of Viṣṇu which is decorated with gold and diamonds and made by Viśvakarma. This fine arrow, which shines like the sun and never misses its mark, was given by Lord Brahmā. Mahendra gave me these two inexhaustible quivers full of sharp arrows that burn like fire. Here is a gilded sword kept in a gold sheath. Formerly, using this bow, Lord Viṣṇu killed great demons in battle and returned opulence and splendor to the residents of heaven. Please accept this bow, two quivers, arrows and sword for Your victory, as Indra accepted the thunderbolt as his weapon.” Having spoken, the holy sage Agastya presented all those weapons to Rāma.

RĀMA'S MEETING WITH AGASTYA

Agastya continued: "O Rāma, I am very pleased. Bless You! I am also very pleased with You, Lakṣmaṇa. Especially since You two have come here, along with Sītā, to offer me Your respects. You are exhausted from Your journey and are sweating. It is also clear that Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, is very tired. She is very young and unaccustomed to such fatigue. She has come to the forest fraught with difficulties out of affection for Her husband. O Rāma see to it that Sītā is comfortable here. She has performed a difficult task by coming with You to the forest. Since the beginning of creation, it has been the nature of women to love a man enjoying good fortune and to give him up when he experiences adversity. Women exhibit the unsteadiness of lightning, the sharpness of a sword, and the speed of an eagle or the wind. But this wife of Yours is free from such defects, is praiseworthy and should be considered like Arundhatī among the demigods. The place where You, along with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, are going to stay is now blessed."

After being spoken to in this way by the sage, Rāma, standing with joined palms, spoke the following words to the sage, who was as brilliant as fire: "O best of sages, I am indeed fortunate and blessed that you, Our preceptor, are so pleased by the qualities possessed by Me, as well as by My brother and wife. However, please inform Me of a region with sufficient water and many forests where We can establish a hermitage and reside comfortably."

Hearing Rāma's request, the righteous sage thought for a while and then spoke the following auspicious words: "Two yojanas from here, My son, is the beautiful and well-known region of Pañcavāṭī which has abundant roots, fruits, water and many deer. Go there, build a cottage and live happily with Lakṣmaṇa. Fully obey the command of Your father. O sinless one, I know the whole story about You and King Daśaratha through the power of my penances and because of my affection for You. I also know the confidential reason why, after agreeing to stay here with me, You inquired

about a suitable place for You to reside. That is why I say to You: ‘Go to Pañcavaṭī,’ for that part of the forest is very enjoyable. Sītā will be very happy there. That region is praiseworthy and not very far, O Rāma. There, near the Godāvarī River, Sītā will be happy. Abounding in roots and fruits, and frequented by flocks of many different birds, it is solitary, holy and enjoyable, O strong-armed one. You also are well-behaved and capable of giving complete protection. Indeed, staying there, You will be able to protect the ascetics. Here You see a large forest of madhūkā trees. You have to go along the northern side leading to a banyan tree. Then, climbing a plateau, not far from a mountain, is the famous forest of Pañcavaṭī, which is always abloom with flowers.”

Receiving these directions from Agastya, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa offered Their respects to the sage and took leave of him. Bowing down to him, with his permission, the two princes accompanied by Sītā left for Pañcavaṭī. Clenching Their bows and with quivers over Their shoulders, the two princes, unafraid in battle, calmly headed toward Pañcavaṭī along the path indicated by the sage.

RĀMA MEETS JAṬĀYU

Now, while going to Pañcavaṭī, Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, came upon a huge-bodied vulture of frightening prowess. Seeing him in the forest, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa thought that the bird was a rākṣasa, and said: “Who are you?” Then, as if to please Them with his sweet and gentle words, he said: “My dear son, know me to be a friend of Your father.” Believing that he really was a friend of His father, Rāma offered him respect and calmly asked about his name and family.

Hearing Rāma’s request, the bird told Him about himself and his family, and about the origin of all things: “Listen, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, as I relate about the progenitors who existed in the past. Kardama was the first of them, and after him came Vikṛta, Śeṣa, Saṁśraya and the valiant Bahuputra, Sthāṇu, Marīci, Atri, the very powerful Kratu, Pulastya, Aṅgirā, the Pracetas and also Pulaha, Dakṣa, Vivasvān and Ariṣṭanemi. The highly effulgent Kaśyapa was the last of them. The progenitor Dakṣa had eight famous daughters, O Rāma. Kaśyapa married his eight beautiful daughters—Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kālakā, Tāmrā, Krodhavaśā, Manu and Analā. Being pleased with those virgin girls, Kaśyapa said to them: “You will give birth to sons like me who will be masters of the three worlds.” O strong-armed Rāma, Aditi, Diti, Danu and Kālakā were attentive, the others were not so.

“Aditi gave birth to thirty-three demigods, O conqueror of enemies—the twelve ādityas, the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras and the two Aśvinikumāras. The sons which Diti produced were the famous Daityas, or demons. Formerly they owned the whole world with its oceans and forests. Danu bore a son named Aśvagrīva. Kālakā also had two sons—Naraka and Kālaka. Tāmrā bore five world-famous daughters—Krauñcī, Bhāsī, Śyenī, Dhṛtarāṣṭrī and Śukī. Krauñcī gave birth to owls; Bhāsī gave birth to bhāsas; Śyenī gave birth to hawks and vultures; Dhṛtarāṣṭrī gave birth to swans and

kālahansas of all types. She also gave birth to cakravākas. Śukī bore a daughter named Natā; and Natā bore a daughter named Vinatā.

O Rāma, Krodhavaśā also bore ten daughters—Mrgī, Mrgamandā, Harī, Bhadramadā, Mātāṅgī, Śārdūlī, Śvetā, Surabhī, Surasā, who was endowed with all good qualities, and Kadrū. O best of men, all forest beats are the progeny of Mrgā, including bears, musk deer, śmaras and camaras. Then Bhadramadā bore a daughter named Irāvati. Her son is the world-renowned elephant Airāvata. Harī's progeny comprised lions, the lowly vānaras and the lāṅgulas. Śārdūlī bore tigers as sons. O best of men, elephants are the progeny of Mātāṅgī. Śvetā bore a son who was one of the elephants guarding the four directions.

Then, O Rāma, Surabhi bore two daughters named Rohiṇī and the glorious Gandharvī. Rohiṇī gave birth to cows, and Gandharvī gave birth to horses as her children. Surasā gave birth to nāgas and Kadrū gave birth to snakes. Manu, the wife of the great soul Kaśyapa, gave birth to human beings comprising the four divisions of brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras. According to the revealed scriptures, the brāhmaṇas were produced from the mouth of the Supreme Lord, the kṣatriyas from His arms, the vaiśyas from His thighs, and the śūdras from His feet. Analā too gave birth to trees bearing pious fruits. Vinatā was the grand-daughter of Śukī and Kadrū was the sister of Surasā. Kadrū gave birth to one thousand nāgas who hold the earth up. Garuḍa and Aruṇa are the two sons of Vinatā. I was born from that Aruṇa, and also my elder brother Sampāti. Know me to be Jaṭāyu, the son of Śyenī, O conqueror of enemies. If You wish, I shall assist You during Your sojourn here, for this impenetrable forest is inhabited by wild beasts and rākṣasas. I shall protect Sītā when You go out with Lakṣmaṇa.”

Lord Rāma offered respect to Jaṭāyu, embraced him affectionately and bowed to him, for Rāma had heard about Jaṭāu's friendship with His father, King Daśaratha, as repeatedly mentioned by Jaṭāyu. Entrusting Sītā to Jaṭāyu, He proceeded toward Pañcavaṭī with the powerful bird and Lakṣmaṇa, desiring to kill the enemy, as a fire burns moths.

CONSTRUCTING A COTTAGE AT PAÑCAVAṬĪ

Reaching Pañcavaṭī, which abounded with numerous snakes and wild beasts, Rāma said to his effulgent brother Lakṣmaṇa: “My dear brother, We have reached a place exactly like that described by the sage Agastya. The region of Pañcavaṭī has forests that are always in bloom. Look all around in the forest, for You are very expert. Decide which would be the best place for Us to construct a cottage. O Lakṣmaṇa, look for a place with water nearby, where Sītā, You and I can enjoy Ourselves, and which has firewood, flowers, kuśa grass and clean water at hand.”

Lakṣmaṇa, with joined palms, spoke the following to Rāma in the presence of Sītā: “O descendant of Kakutstha, as long as You are here, even if that be for one hundred years, I will be submissive to You. Therefore, tell Me to build a cottage at a place which You consider appropriate.” Pleased by Lakṣmaṇa’s reply, Rāma thought for a while and then selected a place that possessed all good qualities. Going to the place selected for building a cottage, Rāma grabbed Lakṣmaṇa by the hand and said:

“This terrain is level, beautiful and surrounded by flowering trees. My dear brother, this is where You should build the cottage. Not far away can be seen a charming lake full of lotus flowers that are as golden as the sun and extremely fragrant, as well as beautiful blue lotuses. Here is the pleasant Godāvārī River lined with flower-bearing trees, just as the self-realized sage Agastya had said. The river teeming with swans, ducks and geese, is neither very far nor very near, and is congested by herds of deer coming for water. Here can be seen lofty mountains covered with flowering trees and many caves, echoing with the cries of peacocks. Scattered about are flakes of minerals, such as gold, silver and copper, resembling the lattice work of a window or the intricate decorations painted on elephants. The mountains are forested with many kinds of trees, such as śāla, tāla, tamāla, date palms,

jack-fruit, nīvāra, tiniśa, punnāga, mango, aśoka, tilaka, ketaka, campaka, syandana, sandalwood, nīpa, parṇāsa, lakuca, dhava, aśvakaṇa, khadira, śamī, kiṁśuka and pāṭala. These are interspersed with flowering bushes and vines. This place is pious; this place is enjoyable; this place abounds in deer and birds. We shall stay here, O Lakṣmaṇa, with the vulture Jaṭāyu.”

Being instructed in this way by Rāma, the exceedingly strong Lakṣmaṇa, who could kill formidable enemies, constructed a cottage for His brother without any delay. Lakṣmaṇa constructed a wide, thatched cottage with mud walls reinforced with strong tree logs for columns. Long bamboo poles supported the roof, which was woven with branches from the śamī tree, fastened with strong cord, and thatched with leaves of kuśa, kāśa and other kinds of reeds. It had a level, earthen floor. The glorious Lakṣmaṇa went to the Godāvārī River, took a bath and, picking lotus flowers and fruits, returned. After making an offering of flowers and intoning hymns for peace as recommended in the scriptures for a new residence, Lakṣmaṇa showed Rāma the cottage which He had constructed. Seeing with Sītā that delightful thatched cottage, Rāma relished great satisfaction. Overjoyed, Rāma tightly embraced Lakṣmaṇa with deep affection, and then said: “I am very pleased with You because of the fine job You have done. As a reward I give You a hug. O Lakṣmaṇa, with a son like You, who knows My feelings, is grateful and so dutiful, My father is not dead.”

After speaking to Lakṣmaṇa in that way, Rāma, who increased others’ glory, lived happily in that region of abundant fruits. The righteous Rāma stayed there for some time, being served by Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, like an immortal god in the heavenly world.

WINTER AT PAÑCAVAṬĪ

While Rāma was residing happily at Pañcavaṭī, the longed-for winter season arrived after the autumn. Once Rāma went at dawn to the Godāvārī River to take a bath. Carrying a water pot, His valiant brother Lakṣmaṇa, following behind Him with Sītā, and said: “Your favorite season has arrived, My dear brother, by which the fortunate year is seemingly adorned. People’s skin is dry due to the cold, and the land is blanketed with crops. Water is unenjoyable because of the chill and fire is more gratifying. Having offered the first fruits of the harvest to the forefathers and demigods and partaken of the remnants, people have expunged their sins. The country people’s desire for bounteous food grains is fulfilled and have a plentiful supply of cow’s milk. Kings are out on expeditions with the desire for conquest. The sun strictly traverses the northern hemisphere presided over by the deity Yama, lord of death. The northern hemisphere appears no better than a woman without tilaka on her forehead. The Himalaya Mountains, which by nature have abundant snow, are even more worthy of their name now that the sun has moved farther north.

“At noon time, the days are enjoyable for strolling because of the touch of warm sunshine on the skin; the sunshine is enjoyable, while shade and water are not. The time has come for days of dim sunlight, thick fog, biting cold, strong winds and empty forests smitten with frost. The nights now inhibit sleeping outdoors, are marked by the constellation puṣya, are sparkling with frost, have grown colder and are longer. The moon, having transferred its good fortune to the sun, is reddish due to frost, like a mirror hazed by breath. Even on a full moon night, the moonlight is not bright, being sullied by frost, just as Sītā does not look as beautiful when She is burnt by the sun. By nature cold and laden with snow, the western wind blows twice as cold in the morning. Covered in dew, the lands yield crops of barley and wheat and are beautiful at sunrise with cranes and herons crying out. The spikes of grain growing in the fields are a beautiful golden color and bent over slightly due to the weight of fully ripened kernels, which resemble

the flowers of the date palm. With its approaching rays enveloped in frost and fog, the sun, though risen high, resembles the moon.

“The sun, being not very strong during the morning, but pleasing at noon—dim and reddish—shines beautifully on the earth. The land of the forests, with its grass slightly wet with dew from the settled frost, looks very beautiful when the sun’s tender rays shine on it. The wild elephants, touching the water to satisfy their excessive thirst, withdraw their trunks because of the water’s chill. Just see how the aquatic fowl do not dive into the water, as the timid do not enter into a fight. The trees—flowerless, covered in dew and enveloped in darkness by fog—appear to be asleep. At present, since their waters are concealed by fog and their cranes can only be discerned by their cries, the streams are only recognized by their sandy banks wet with frost. By the coldness of fallen frost and the mildness of the sun, the mountain water is generally more tasty. Destroyed by snow, the lotus beds, with their flowers withered with age, and their pericarps and filaments shrivelled up, have only stalks left and do not look well.

“At the present time, O tiger among men, the righteous soul Bharata, out of devotion to You, is in the city practicing austerities because of being overwhelmed with sorrow. Having renounced the kingdom, honor and all kinds of enjoyments, the ascetic is sleeping on the cold, bare earth and is eating very sparingly. He too, at this same time, must be going daily to the Sarayu River accompanied by His ministers to take a bath. How does that tender youth, who is really meant to enjoy life and was raised with unlimited comforts, bathe in the Sarayu River at such an early hour of the morning? His eyes are like lotus petals; He is valiant, sultry, big and has a flat stomach. He is conversant with duty, speaks truthfully, is bashful and has conquered His senses. He speaks sweetly, is friendly, has long arms and can crush any enemy. He has given up all kinds of enjoyment and has completely taken shelter of You. Heaven has been conquered by Your great-souled brother Bharata. He is following You in the execution of austerities, even though You are residing far away in the forest. The famous saying about the son not taking after the father but after the mother has been disproven by Bharata. How is it that Kaikeyī has such a cruel streak when her husband is King Daśaratha and Her son is the goodly Bharata?”

Unable to bear Lakṣmaṇa's words out of affection for Kaikeyī, Rāma replied as follows: "My dear brother, You should never condemn our intermediate mother. Now only tell Me about that great descendant of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, Bharata. Certainly My mind is fixed on residing in the forest, but, being pained by affection for Bharata, it is again becoming bewildered. I remember His kind, sweet, affectionate, nectarean and heart-pleasing words. When will I be reunited with the great soul Bharata, the valorous Śatrughna and You, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty?"

Talking in this way, He reached the Godāvarī River and bathed in the company of His younger brother and Sītā. After offering libations with those waters to the forefathers and demigods, together They recited hymns in praise of the sun god and other deities. Having finished bathing, Rāma, with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa at His sides, looked like Lord Śiva with Pārvatī and Nandī freshly bathed in the Ganges.

ŚŪRPAṆAKHĀ ARRIVES AT THE COTTAGE

When They had finished Their bath, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa returned from the bank of the Godāvārī River to Their cottage. Upon arriving, Rāma performed His morning religious duties with Lakṣmaṇa and then entered the thatched cottage. Being worshiped by great sages, He stayed there happily, discussing various topics with His brother Lakṣmaṇa. Sitting inside the thatched cottage with Sītā, the strong-armed Rāma shone very brightly, like the moon accompanied by the constellation citra.

While Rāma was seated, absorbed in conversation, a certain rākṣasī arrived in the area by chance. The rākṣasī named Śūrpaṇakhā, the sister of the ten-headed rākṣasa Rāvaṇa, arrived and saw Rāma, who looked as handsome as one of the residents of the heavenly planets. She saw that Rāma's chest was like a lion's. He had big arms that reached down to His knees, eyes shaped like the petals of a lotus flower, a shining face, and an extremely pleasing appearance. His gait was like an elephant's, and He wore matted hair tied in a knot atop His head. He was youthful, but very powerful, and endowed with the characteristics of a monarch. Rāma was swarthy like a blue lotus flower, as effulgent as Cupid and equal to Lord Indra. Seeing Him, the rākṣasī became overwhelmed with lust.

Whereas Rāma was good-looking, thin-waisted, broad-eyed, fine-haired, well-proportioned, sonorous, gentle, frank, of just conduct and agreeable, the rākṣasī was ugly and fat-bellied. She had hideous eyes and hair the color of copper. She was disproportionate, had a frightening voice, was cruel and old, spoke deceptively, was very misbehaved and unsightly. She addressed Lord Rāma as follows: "Wearing matted hair and dressed in the garb of an ascetic, accompanied by Your wife, and carrying a bow and arrows, how have You come to this region frequented by rākṣasas? What is the reason for Your visit? Please tell me the truth."

Being questioned in this way by the rākṣasī Śūrpaṇakhā, Rāma, the conqueror of enemies, began telling her everything because of His straightforward nature. Rāma never approved of lying, especially with Sītā at His side in the cottage. He therefore said: “There was a king named Daśaratha with prowess like the gods. I am his first-born son known by the people under the name Rāma. This is My younger brother named Lakṣmaṇa, who is devoted to Me. And this is My wife, the princess of the Videha Dynasty, known by the name Sītā. By the order of My father and mother, I have come to this forest to fulfill My obligation and to uphold righteousness. Now I wish to know about You. Tell Me who you are and to what family you belong? You appear to Me to be a rākṣasī with an uncomely body. Tell Me the actual reason for which you came here.”

Upon hearing Rāma’s questions, the lust-smitten rākṣasī replied: “Listen, O Rāma! I shall tell You the truth. I am a rākṣasī named Śūrpaṇakhā, and I can assume any form at will. Roaming this forest alone, I strike fear in the hearts of everyone. My brother is the very powerful lord of the rākṣasas named Rāvaṇa. He is the valiant son of Viśravā, in case You may have heard. I also have another extremely powerful brother named Kumbhakarṇa, who sleeps excessively. My brother Vibhīṣaṇa, however, is a pious soul and does not act like a rākṣasa. I also have two other brothers well-known for their prowess—Khara and Dūṣaṇa. I surpass all of them. O Rāma, from the first time that I saw You, I have wholeheartedly desired You, the best of men, as my husband. I possess mighty powers and can wander at will due to my strength. Be my husband forever. Of what good is Sītā to You? Being misshaped and ugly, She is not fit for You. I alone am a suitable match for You. See me as Your wife. I shall devour this deformed, unchaste, hideous human woman with a sunken belly, along with this brother of Yours. Then, looking at the different mountain peaks and forests, You will wander through the Daṇḍakā Forest with me as your lover.”

Hearing this, Rāma laughed heartily and, being expert in speaking, replied to the rākṣasī whose eyes were red due to intoxication.

LAṢMAṆA DISFIGURES ŚŪRPAṆAKHĀ

Rāma smiled and spoke as He wished to the rākṣasī who was bound with the fetters of love: “O lady, I am already married. Here is my dear wife. For ladies like you, to live with a co-wife is most miserable. But here is My younger brother named Lakṣmaṇa, who is well-behaved, good-looking, glorious, valiant and living without a wife. He possesses unique qualities, is young, of pleasing appearance, and desires to have a wife. He is suitable to be the husband of one with a beautiful body like yours. O broad-eyed and graceful lady, choose this brother of Mine as your husband, free from a co-wife, as the sunlight always illuminates Mount Meru.”

Being spoken to in this way by Rāma, the rākṣasī, bewildered as she was by lust, left Rāma suddenly and said to Lakṣmaṇa: “With my lovely complexion, I shall be a suitable wife for You, having as You do such a handsome form. You will happily wander throughout the entire Daṇḍakā Forest with me.”

When the rākṣasī finished talking, Lakṣmaṇa, who was very eloquent, smiled and spoke the following just words: “Why do you wish to become a slave-woman by marrying Me, a slave? I am in fact subservient to My noble brother, O woman as red as a lotus flower. Fulfill your purpose by becoming My noble brother’s younger wife, happy and with a spotless complexion, since He possesses great wealth. He will surely abandon this deformed, unchaste, hideous and sunken-bellied old wife and accept only you. O exquisite woman, what wise man could abandon this most excellent form of yours and fix his love on human women?”

After Lakṣmaṇa had said this, the loathsome, pot-bellied rākṣasī, being too naive to understand the joke, believed that what He said was true. Being deluded by lust, she once again addressed Rāma, who was sitting in the thatched cottage with Sītā: “Clinging to this deformed, unchaste, hideous, sunken-bellied, old wife, You do not give me much importance.

Now I shall devour this human woman as You watch. Having rid myself of this co-wife, I shall wander with You at ease.”

Saying this, the rākṣasī whose eyes resembled red-hot coals, rushed toward the fawn-eyed Sītā, as a meteor falls toward the constellation named rohiṇī. Stopping her as she rushed toward Sītā like the noose of death, Rāma, being angry, said to Lakṣmaṇa: “You should never joke with cruel and ignoble people, O son of Sumitrā. See how Sītā has barely survived. O tiger among men, You should disfigure this repulsive, impious, wanton and big-bellied rākṣasī.”

As instructed, the angry Lakṣmaṇa drew His sword and cut off her ears and nose in front of Rāma. Having her ears and nose severed and bellowing tumultuously, the horrible Śūrpaṇakhā rushed into the forest on the same path by which she had come. Drenched in blood, that grotesque and fearsome rākṣasī howled in various ways, like a rain cloud during the monsoon. Shedding blood profusely, flailing her arms and bellowing, the ghastly rākṣasī entered the great forest. Then, when the mutilated rākṣasī reached her brother Khara, who lived in the region called Janasthāna surrounded by multitudes of rākṣasas, she fell on the ground like a bolt of lighting from the sky. Faint with fear and soaked with blood, she told Khara everything about how Rāma had come to the forest with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, and about how she had been mutilated.

ŚŪRPAṆAKHĀ APPRAISES KHARA OF THE SITUATION

Seeing his sister Śūrpaṇakhā fallen down, disfigured and soaked in blood, the rākṣasa Khara was burning with anger and asked: “Get up and tell me how this happened to you. Give up your swoon and bewilderment. Tell me exactly who mutilated you in this way. Who has sat in front of an offenseless and venomous black snake, and then hit it on the nose with the tip of his finger for amusement? He who committed this heinous deed has now drunken poison and, because of delusion, is unaware that he has fastened the noose of death around his own neck. By whom were you brought to this condition, when you are endowed with power and prowess, can go wherever you wish and can assume any form you please? Who among the gods, gandharvas, ghosts, sages and great souls is so valorous that he could have mutilated you in this manner? I do not see anyone in this world who would dare displease me, not even the thousand-eyed Indra, lord of the immortal gods, who killed the demon Pāka. As a swan can filter out milk when mixed with water, so shall I take away the life of that scoundrel with my arrows.

“Whose frothing blood does the earth wish to drink when he has been killed by me with arrows piercing his vital organs? Whose flesh will be torn from his body by birds gathered around to eat him with pleasure after I have killed him in battle? Neither gods, nor gandharvas, nor witches, nor rākṣasas will be able to protect that miserable wretch when I drag him across the battlefield. Gradually regaining consciousness, tell me what miscreant attacked and subdued you in the forest.”

Upon hearing this inquiry from her brother who was especially angry, Śūrpaṇakhā tearfully spoke the following: “There are two brothers—Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa—the sons of King Daśaratha. They are young, handsome, gentle and very strong. They have eyes as broad as lotus petals. They wear bark cloth and the skin of black antelopes. They eat only roots and fruits, are self-controlled and austere, and are practicing celibacy. They

look like the kings of the gandharvas and possess the characteristics of monarchs. I was unable to ascertain whether They were gods or demons. I also saw in Their midst a young woman who possessed great beauty. She was slim-waisted and decorated lavishly with gold ornaments and jewels. It was on her account that those two reduced me to such a condition, like an unprotected and unchaste woman. I wish to drink the foamy blood of that woman of crooked ways, as well as of the two brothers, killed in the fore of battle. This is my principal desire, that you act so that I can drink Her's and Their blood in the battle arena.”

While she was still speaking, the infuriated Khara instructed fourteen extremely powerful rākṣasas who were equal to death personified: “Two humans bearing weapons and wearing bark cloth and the skins of black antelopes have entered the formidable Daṇḍakā Forest with a woman. After killing the two men, kill that woman of wicked actions. This sister of mine will then drink Their blood. O rākṣasas, go there immediately and kill Them by your strength, thus fulfilling this cherished wish of my sister. Overjoyed to see those two brothers killed in combat by you, she will gladly drink Their blood on the battlefield.”

Being commanded in this way, those fourteen rākṣasas went there with Śūrpaṇakhā like a cloud driven by a gale wind.

RĀMA KILLS THE FOURTEEN RĀKṢASAS

When the fiendish Śūrpaṇakhā reached Rāma's cottage, she pointed out to the rākṣasas the two brothers and Sītā. They saw the mighty Rāma seated in the thatched cottage with Sītā and attended by Lakṣmaṇa. Seeing that Śūrpaṇakhā and the other rākṣasas had arrived, Rāma said to His effulgent brother Lakṣmaṇa: "Stay here with Sītā for a while. I shall kill these rākṣasas that have followed Śūrpaṇakhā here." Hearing what the self-realized Rāma said, Lakṣmaṇa replied "So be it."

The virtuous Rāma strung His huge bow adorned with gold filigree and said to the rākṣasas: "We two sons of King Daśaratha—Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa—have entered the impassable Daṇḍakā Forest with Sītā. Why do you wish to harm Us who eat only roots and fruits, and are practicing self-control, austerities and righteousness while residing in the Daṇḍakā Forest? On the request of the sages, I have come armed with a bow to kill you sinful wretches perpetrating nefarious deeds. Stand where you are without fear. Do not come back again. If you have any desire to live, then go back, O night-stalkers."

On hearing what Rāma said, the fourteen red-eyed and savage rākṣasas, who were slayers of brāhmaṇas and who carried spears in their hands, angrily replied to Rāma: "Having enraged our master, the great soul Khara, You will certainly be killed by us today in combat. We are many but You are alone. What ability do You have to stand on the battlefield before us or moreover engage in combat with us? By the striking force of the iron clubs, tridents and swords flung by our arms, You will give up Your life and the bow clutched in Your hands."

When they finished saying this, the fourteen infuriated and merciless rākṣasas ran precipitously toward Rāma with raised tridents and flung them at the invincible Rāma. Those fourteen missiles were shattered

by Rāma's firing fourteen arrows adorned with gold. Thereafter, Rāma, being highly incensed, grabbed fourteen headless arrows that were gleaming like the sun and sharpened on a stone. Pulling back the string of His bow and aiming at the rākṣasas, Rāma shot the arrows as Indra might hurl thunderbolts. The golden arrows, bright as a smokeless flame, pierced with great force the rākṣasa's chests, drenching them with blood. They collapsed on the ground, muting the sound of the arrows as they did. When their hearts were pierced, they collapsed lifeless on the ground, maimed and soaked in blood, like felled trees.

Seeing them fallen on the ground, the rākṣasī fainted due to ire. Then again she became so terrified that she started bellowing frightfully. With rapidity she bellowed again and again. Being bewildered, she fled to where Khara was. Upon reaching Khara, her blood now somewhat dry, she once again fell down out of agony, as does a vine covered with slippery resin. Pained with grief and looking despondent, she began moaning loudly before her brother and shed tears. Having witnessed the massacre of the rākṣasas in battle, Śūrpaṇakhā had again fled that place where Rāma was to inform Khara of all that had happened.

KHARA DESIRES TO FIGHT WITH RĀMA

Seeing that Śūrpaṇakhā had returned and was again fallen on the ground without achieving her goal, Khara, out of anger, said: “I just now sent those brave, flesh-eating rākṣasas to please you. Why are you crying again? They are devoted and attached to me and are always engaged in my welfare. Even when killed they do not die, and they would never fail to carry out my order. I want to hear the reason why you are again lying on the ground like a snake and crying out, ‘O lord!’ Why do you lament like a shelterless woman when I am present as your protector? Get up! Get up! Do not cry! Give up this cowardice!”

Feeling comforted by Khara’s words and rubbing her tearful eyes, the dreadful rākṣasī said to her brother Khara: “A little while ago I came to you with my ears and nose cut off, bleeding badly, and you consoled me. To kill Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa as I desired, you dispatched fourteen valiant rākṣasas. Although haughty and armed with tridents and spears, they were all killed in battle by Rāma whose arrows pierced their vital organs. The very moment I saw those swift rākṣasas fallen on the ground and the extraordinary feat performed by Rāma, I became dumbfounded by a great fear. Being frightened, aggrieved and despondent, O night-stalker, and seeing fear on all sides, I have again come to you for shelter. Why do you not rescue me, seeing that I am drowning in a vast ocean of sorrow infested with the crocodiles of despair and repeatedly dashed by waves of terror? Moreover, those flesh-eating rākṣasas who followed me there are lying on the ground, felled by the sharp arrows of Rāma.

“If you have compassion for me and for those rākṣasas, and if you have the ability and energy to deal with Rāma, then destroy that thorn in the side of the rākṣasa race who is residing in the Daṇḍakā Forest. If you do not kill my enemy Rāma today, I shall give up my life in front of you, shameless as I am from being deprived of my ears and nose. By my intuition

I can clearly see that you cannot stand up to the great Rāma in battle, even with your army. Although you consider yourself brave, you have no courage; you have falsely assumed that you are valiant. You cannot slay Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, who are but human beings. Then again, if you have the power and strength to take on Rāma, go kill Him at His residence in Daṇḍakāraṇya, O disgrace of your race! How can you remain living in this forest, deprived as you are of strength and valor? Quickly abandon this place of Janasthāna along with all your friends and relatives. Being defeated by Rāma's prowess, you will soon be destroyed. Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha, is indeed endowed with prowess. His brother also possesses great prowess, by whom I have been disfigured."

Lamenting excessively in this way, the swollen-bellied rākṣasī fell unconscious beside her brother due to the pangs of sorrow, so it is said. Stricken with anguish, she beat her hands on her stomach and wailed.

THE RĀKṢASA ARMY APPROACHES PAÑCAVAṬĪ

When Śūrpaṇakhā finished speaking in this way to the rākṣasa warriors, Khara, standing in their midst, addressed her in a most harsh tone: “On account of this insult against you, my anger is unequaled and cannot be checked, no more than the rising of the ocean under a full moon. I do not consider Rāma to be anything as far as valor is concerned. That human’s life span is now expired. Because of His vile deeds, He will this very day surrender His life in battle. Śūrpaṇakhā, stop crying! Give up your bewilderment! I shall send Rāma with His brother to the court of Yama, the lord of death. O rākṣasī, you will shortly drink the warm, red blood of Rāma lying on the ground deprived of His life after being struck down with an axe.”

Hearing these words sprung from the mouth of Khara, Śūrpaṇakhā was very pleased and, out of foolishness, again praised her brother who was the greatest of those rākṣasas. After being abused by Śūrpaṇakhā, and then praised, Khara said to his general Dūṣaṇa: “Command fourteen thousand rākṣasas who are obedient to my will and terribly impetuous, who never retreat from battle, who are the color of a dark blue storm cloud, who are despicable and barbarous, who delight in injuring people, who are the fiercest of soldiers and equal to tigers, and who have huge mouths and tremendous strength, to prepare for battle. My dear general, immediately bring my chariot, bow and arrows, as well as many kinds of swords and sharp spears. I want to march at the head of the rākṣasa warriors descended from Paulastya in order to slay the mischievous Rāma.”

As Khara was saying this, Dūṣaṇa announced the arrival of the chariot which was radiant like the sun and drawn by spotted horses. The chariot was shaped like the peak of Mount Meru. It was wrought with smelted gold and had golden wheels. The chariot’s hitching pole was made of

vaidurya gem. It's gold surfaces were engraved with designs of fish, flowers, trees, mountains, the sun and moon, auspicious flocks of birds, and stars. It was outfitted with flags and swords and adorned with small tinkling bells. Khara then indignantly mounted that chariot hitched to five horses. Seeing that the army was equipped with chariots, shields, weapons and flags, Khara and Dūṣaṇa ordered all the rākṣasas to advance. Thereafter, the fully armed rākṣasa army left Janasthāna with a sudden uproar. Their weapons included mallets, spears, tridents, razor-sharp axes, swords, discuses spinning in their hands, javelins, fearsome clubs with iron spikes, long bows, maces, scimitars, iron bars, and dreadful looking thunderbolts which they held. The fourteen thousand unassailable rākṣasas, who were acting according to the wishes of Khara, departed from Janasthāna.

Seeing the rākṣasas capable of atrocious actions rushing out, Khara's chariot moved a little further ahead. Then, understanding the desire of Khara, his charioteer hurried the spotted horses decked with fittings of wrought gold. Driven forward with speed, Khara's chariot filled the surrounding directions with its sound. Khara was furious and howled coarsely as he rushed forward like death personified to kill his enemy. He urged the charioteer to go faster, roaring like a cloud raining down hailstones.

KHARA REACHES RĀMA'S COTTAGE

While the rākṣasa army was on the march, a giant cloud the color of a donkey made a frightening tumult as it rained down inauspicious blood. The swift horses hitched to Khara's chariot happened to stumble and fall on a part of the royal highway that was flat and strewn with flowers. The sun was surrounded by a dark, blood-red halo that resembled a twirling firebrand. Then an oversized and fearsome vulture flew toward the principal flag raised on a golden pole and landed on it.

Upon reaching the outer limits of Janasthāna, carnivorous beasts and birds raised shrill and discordant cries. In the sun-lit area of the forest, the blood-curdling howls of jackals struck fear in the hearts of all, foreboding ill for those practitioners of the black arts. There were ominous, billowing clouds like elephants which were covering the sky and bearing blood instead of water. There was a strange, unnerving darkness that made one's hair stand on end. One could not see clearly in any direction. The sky was aglow with the colors of twilight, even though it was not that time of day. Fierce birds and beasts faced Khara and cried out. Buzzards, jackals and vultures, foreboding danger, and female jackals of menacing appearance, which always indicate bad luck in battle, were facing Khara and howling with gaping mouths vomiting flames.

Near the sun could be seen a headless body that resembled a bulky iron club. The great planet Rāhu eclipsed the sun even though it was not the astronomical time for it. The wind blew relentlessly and the sun lost its brilliance. Stars flashed like fireflies even though it was not nighttime. Lotus ponds had their blossoms withered and their fish and fowl dispersed. At that moment the trees shed their fruits and flowers. Without any wind, a grey cloud of dust rose up into the air. The sārīkās called out "chee-chee-koo-chee," and meteors of ominous appearance fell screaming from the sky. The earth with its mountain ranges and woodlands quaked. While Khara directed his rumbling chariot ahead, his left arm trembled and his voice

became choked up. As he looked all around, his vision became impaired by tears. A pain began throbbing in his forehead, still he did not turn back because of his illusion.

Seeing those hair-raising omens of great misfortune, Khara laughingly said to all the rākṣasas: “On the basis of my prowess, I do not think much of all these evil portents which have arisen just now, as a strong man does not fear the weak. With my sharp arrows I can even shoot down stars from the sky. Enraged as I am, I shall make death succumb to mortality. I must not return without killing with my sharp arrows Rāma, who is proud of His strength, and His brother Lakṣmaṇa.

“Let my sister Śūrpaṇakhā, who has been wronged by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, have her desire fulfilled by drinking Their blood. I have never previously been defeated on the battlefield. This is clearly evident to you. I am not lying. When I am angry, I can slay even the king of the gods Indra with his thunderbolt in hand and riding his maddened elephant Airāvata, what to speak of those two humans.”

Hearing his boisterous shouting, that great army of rākṣasas enjoyed unmatched delight, although they were now caught in the noose of death. Desiring to witness the battle, pious and great-souled sages, gods, gandharvas, siddhas, and cāraṇas gathered together and began to discuss among themselves: “We wish good luck to the cows and brāhmaṇas; as well as to all those whom the people respect. As Lord Viṣṇu with His discus in hand defeated the foremost of demons, may Rāma, the descendant of King Raghu, defeat in battle the night-prowling rākṣasas descended from Paulastya.” Saying this and many other things, the great sages and demigods seated in aerial vehicles were very eager to see the army of rākṣasas whose lives were about to expire.

Khara rode swiftly in his chariot ahead of the army. He was surrounded by the following most valiant warriors: Śyenagāmī, Pṛthugrīva, Yajñaśatru, Vihaṅgama, Durjaya, Karavīrākṣa, Paruṣa, Kālākārmuka, Hemamālī,

Mahāmālī, Sarpāsya and Rudirāśana. At the head of the army, following Dūṣaṇa, were Mahākapāla, Sthūlākṣa, Pramātha and Triśirā. Desireous as they were for battle, the formidable army of fierce rākṣasas rushed forward with impetuosity. They suddenly reached the place where the two princes were, like a group of planets rushing toward the sun and moon.

RĀMA SEES GOOD OMENS

As Khara was arriving at Rāma's hermitage, Rāma and His brother saw the same omens. Indignant at seeing those evil omens that were harmful to the people in general, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: "O strong-armed one, see these significant omens indicating the destruction of all things and which have arisen for the slaughter of all the rākṣasas. These greyish clouds floating in the sky are pouring down showers of blood and thundering terribly. My clever Lakṣmaṇa, all My arrows are smoking and ecstatic at the prospect of battle and my gold-plated bows are beginning to stir. The kind of forest birds that are calling here indicate that ahead lies fearlessness for Us and loss of life for the rākṣasas. There will undoubtedly be a very great conflict. My right arm is throbbing repeatedly, foretelling Our victory and the defeat of Our enemy, O valiant one. Furthermore, Your face appears very bright and cheerful. When the faces of those who are about to fight are pale, it indicates that they will lose their lives.

"Do You hear that great tumult? It is the frightful roar of the cruel-acting rākṣasas and the beating of their kettle drums. A wise person who is desirous of his own good should prepare himself when he sees approaching danger. Therefore, taking Sītā, with bow and arrows in hand, go take shelter in a mountain cave which is difficult to reach and surrounded by trees. My dear brother, I do not want You to try to counter My request. I order You to go without any delay. Being valiant and strong, You can indeed kill these rākṣasas. There is no doubt about it. But I want to kill all these night-stalkers Myself."

Being commanded in this way by Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa grabbed his bow and arrows and hid with Sītā in an inaccessible cave. When Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā had entered the cave, Rāma said: "I am glad that My request has been carried out." Then He put on His coat of armor. Adorned with that armor as resplendent as fire, Rāma resembled a flame that had sprung up in darkness.

Picking up His large bow and arrows, the valiant Rāma stood there filling all directions with the sound of the plucking of His bow string.

Thereupon demigods, gandharvas, siddhas, cāraṇas, and great souls gathered with the intent of viewing the battle. After gathering together, the sages, great souls and brahmaṛṣis who perform acts of piety said to one another: “Good luck to the cows and brāhmaṇas! May Lord Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, defeat in combat the night-prowling rākṣasas descended from Paulastya, as Viṣṇu, with cakra in hand, slew the foremost of demons in battle.” Saying this and looking at each other, they again said: “There are fourteen thousand rākṣasas of terrible deed, whereas the pious soul Rāma is alone. How will He be able to fight them?”

Thus the rājarṣis, the siddhas and their followers, the best of the brāhmaṇas, and the demigods seated in their aerial vehicles were filled with curiosity. Seeing Rāma covered with glory and standing at the fore of battle, all living beings were overcome with fear. The unequaled form of Lord Rāma, who never tired in action, appeared like the enraged great-souled Rudra.

While the demigods, gandharvas and cāraṇas were speaking, the army of those practitioners of the black arts approached from all sides, making a loud uproar and brandishing fearsome swords, shields and flags. The tumultuous sound of the rākṣasas, who were uttering heroic slogans, discussing their plan of attack amongst each other, plucking their bow strings, jumping around, making frightful sounds and beating kettle drums, filled the forest. Frightened by the noise, the forest-dwelling beasts of prey fled for a quiet part of the forest without looking back. Armed with many different weapons, the multitudinous army, which was like an ocean, rushed headlong toward Rāma. Glancing on all sides, Rāma, who was also expert in warfare, surveyed the army of Khara and went out to confront it in combat.

Drawing back His bow and pulling out arrows from His quiver, He summoned intense anger for the slaughter of all the rākṣasas. Seething in rage, He was as difficult to look upon as the fire at the end of the age. Seeing Him covered with such glory, the forest spirits were distressed. Rāma’s angry form resembled that of Śiva when he went to halt the sacrifice performed by

Dakṣa. With their bows, ornaments, chariots, and armor shining like fire, the army of flesh-eating demons looked like a dark-blue cloud at sunrise.

KHARA'S ARMY ATTACKS RĀMA

Reaching the cottage, Khara and his followers saw the furious Rāma, the destroyer of enemies, clenching His bow. Seeing Rāma, Khara lifted his bow and made a loud twang by plucking its string. Then he commanded his charioteer: "Drive the chariot in front of Rāma." On the order of Khara, the charioteer urged the horses on to where the strong-armed Rāma stood alone shaking His bow. Seeing that Khara had reached where Rāma was, the night-prowling rākṣasas roared loudly and surrounded Khara on all sides. As Khara sat on his chariot in the midst of those practitioners of the black arts, he resembled the planet Mars shining among the other stars.

Khara struck Rāma, whose power was immeasurable, with one thousand arrows and roared mightily on the battlefield. Thereafter all the night-prowling demons, being infuriated, attacked with different kinds of weapons Rāma, who carried a formidable bow and was difficult to conquer. The rākṣasas, given as they were to anger, assaulted the heroic Rāma on the battlefield with iron clubs, tridents, swords and axes. The extremely strong rākṣasas with their huge bodies resembled clouds. Riding chariots, horses and elephants with the desire to kill Rāma, they raced toward Him like clouds assaulting a mountain peak. The rākṣasa horde showered arrows upon Rāma, as storm clouds pummel Mount Meru with torrential rain. Surrounded on all sides by fearful-looking rākṣasas, Rāma resembled Lord Śiva surrounded by his associates on the day known as pradoṣa. Rāma blocked the missiles fired by those practitioners of the black arts with His own arrows, as the ocean nullifies the effect of the rivers entering it. Śrī Rāma's bodily limbs were unpained by the terrible missiles, like a big mountain unshaken by the repeated strikes of flashing lightning bolts. Being wounded and His limbs smeared with blood, Rāma looked like the sun at twilight covered by clouds. The gods, gandharvas, siddhas and topmost sages became very distressed upon seeing Rāma standing alone and surrounded by many thousands of rākṣasas.

On account of His anger, Rāma pulled back His bow and fired into the battlefield hundreds and thousands of sharp arrows which were unhinderable and unbearable like Death's rod of chastisement. Rāma playfully shot arrows straight into the enemy army, which took away the lives of the rākṣasas like the noose of death. Piercing through the bodies of the rākṣasas, the blood-soaked arrows entered the sky, shining as bright as flames of fire. Innumerable sharpened arrows, which took away the lives of the rākṣasas, were shot forth from Rāma's bent bow. With them, Rāma split by the hundreds and thousands their bows, flag poles, shields, armor, arms and hands decorated with gold ornaments, and their thighs that resembled the trunks of elephants. The arrows fired by Rāma cut and pierced on the battle arena horses wearing gold armor that were hitched to chariots, as well as their charioteers, elephants and their drivers, horses and their riders, and foot soldiers, dispatching them all to the court of the lord of death.

Being maimed by the steel-tipped arrows, solid steel arrows and barbed arrows of Rāma, the night-stalkers let out terrifying groans of agony. Afflicted by the many arrows piercing their vital organs, the army could find no relief, like a dry forest being consumed by a wild fire. Incensed as they were, some of the rākṣasa warriors who were dreadfully strong hurled barbed spears, tridents and axes at Rāma. The strong-armed Rāma intercepted their weapons with His arrows and took their lives by cutting their throats in combat. With their heads chopped off and their shields and bows shattered, they fell on the ground like trees toppled by the wind storm caused by the wings of Garuḍa, the eagle carrier of Lord Viṣṇu. The night-stalkers that were still alive, suffering from arrow wounds and disorientation, ran to take shelter of Khara. Consoling them all and grabbing his bow, the seething Dūṣaṇa rushed toward the infuriated Rāma, like wrathful death personified. Emboldened by the backing of Dūṣaṇa, they all returned, rushing upon Rāma, with trees and stones as weapons. Holding tridents, clubs and nooses in their hands, the very mighty rākṣasas began showering arrows and other weapons on the battlefield. They also released a shower of trees and stones.

That fight between Rāma and the rākṣasas was amazing, tumultuous, hair-raising and most shocking. The maddened rākṣasas surrounded Rāma and again began assailing Him. Seeing that all the

directions and intermediate directions were blocked by rākṣasas, the mighty Rāma, being pelted by a shower of arrows, let out a terrifying yell and fired the extremely resplendent gāndharva weapon at the rākṣasas. Thereafter from His arched bow shot forth thousands of arrows. All the ten directions were covered by that assembly of arrows. Afflicted as they were by Rāma's arrows, they could not see Him picking the arrows up or shooting them; they only saw Him drawing back the bow string repeatedly. The darkness caused by the arrows covered the sky, including the sun. Rāma stood there continuously shooting arrows. Being killed all at the same time with great force by Rāma's arrows, the rākṣasas fell in unison on the ground, their bodies lying scattered all about. Here and there could be seen by the thousands rākṣasas who were killed, fallen, exhausted, cut, pierced and disemboweled. The earth looked ghastly due to the ground being strewn with turbaned heads, arms, legs and many different kinds of ornaments, as well as horses, elephants, broken chariots, yak-tail whisks, parasols and flags of different types—all these being destroyed by Rāma's arrows—as well as broken tridents, spears, swords, barbed darts and axes, stones reduced to powder and many kinds of splintered arrows. When they saw all their slain comrades, the rākṣasas were unable to approach Rāma, the conqueror of enemy strongholds.

RĀMA SLAYS THE REMAINING RĀKṢASAS AND DŪṢAṆA

Seeing his army being annihilated, Dūṣaṇa sent forward five thousand rākṣasas who were exceptionally strong, terribly violent, difficult to approach, and who never retreated from battle. They assaulted Rāma from all sides with tridents, spears, swords, stones and tree trunks, as well as a shower of arrows. The righteous Rāma counteracted that life-threatening shower of tree trunks and stones with sharp arrows. After halting the assault, Rāma closed His eyes like a bull and summoned His full ire for the destruction of all the rākṣasas. Seething with anger as if burning with glory, He thereupon fired arrows at the entire rākṣasa army, along with Dūṣaṇa.

Then General Dūṣaṇa, the defiler of enemies, contained Rāma with arrows that were like thunderbolts. Angered by that, Rāma split Dūṣaṇa's bow with an arrow and killed his four horses with four arrows. After killing the horses, He severed the head off Dūṣaṇa's charioteer using an arrow tipped with a crescent-shaped blade. He then pierced Dūṣaṇa's chest with three arrows. With his bow broken and being deprived of his chariot because of the slaughter of his horses and charioteer, Dūṣaṇa grabbed an iron-plated club which resembled a mountain peak. It was surrounded with gold bands, capable of crushing the army of the celestials, studded with sharp iron spikes, smeared with the fat of enemies, as hard to the touch as a thunderbolt, capable of smashing the gates of enemy fortresses, and hair-raising to see.

Tightly grasping that club which resembled a large serpent, Dūṣaṇa, a night-stalker of cruel deeds, rushed upon Rāma. As Dūṣaṇa was charging toward Him, Rāma cut off with two arrows both of Dūṣaṇa's arms with the bracelets adorning his hands. The huge club fell from his severed limb in the fore of battle, like a flag carried in the fore in honor of Indra. Dūṣaṇa fell on the ground with his severed limbs, like a proud elephant who has had his

long tusks removed. Seeing Dūṣaṇa killed in battle and fallen on the ground, all living beings glorified Lord Rāma and shouted: “Well done! Well done!”

In the meantime, three generals who led the army—Mahākālāpa, Sthūlākṣa and Pramāthī—rushed toward Rāma together, bound as they were with the noose of death. The rākṣasa Mahākāpāla lifted a broad trident, Sthūlākṣa grabbed a spear and Pramāthī, an axe. When Rāma saw them approaching, he greeted them with sharpened arrows as if an offering for newly arrived guests. Lord Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, severed the head of Mahākāpāla; with innumerable arrows He struck down Pramāthī; and filled Sthūlākṣa’s big eyes with arrows. The three of them fell dead on the ground like a large tree with branches. The angry Rāma then killed the remaining five thousand followers of Dūṣaṇa with exactly five thousand arrows, immediately sending them to the court of the lord of death. Hearing of the slaughter of Dūṣaṇa and his followers, Khara instructed his mighty generals: “Here is Dūṣaṇa slain in combat, along with his followers. Engaging Rāma in battle with your mighty army, all you rākṣasas should kill Him with your multitude of weapons.”

Saying this, Khara ran toward Rāma. The twelve valiant generals—Śyenagāmī, Pṛthugrīva, Yajñāśatru, Vihaṅgama, Durjaya, Karavīrākṣa, Paruṣa, Kālākārmuka, Hemamālī, Mahāmālī, Sarpāśya and Rudhirāśana—dashed toward Rāma with their army, firing their best arrows. Then, with His arrows encrusted with gold and diamonds and which were blazing like fire, the glorious Rāma killed the remainder of the rākṣasa army. Those golden-feathered arrows that shone like a smokeless fire obliterated the rākṣasas as a thunderbolt fells a tree. On the front line of the battle, Rāma killed one hundred rākṣasas with one hundred arrows and one thousand rākṣasas with one thousand arrows. With their armor and ornaments shattered, their bows destroyed and their bodies smeared with blood, the night-stalkers fell on the ground. The battleground was covered with fallen cadavers stained with blood and scattered hair, like dry kuśa grass spread all over the ground around a sacrificial altar. At that time, the forest’s floor was most horrible and resembled hell, being muddied with the flesh and blood of slain rākṣasas.

Fourteen thousand rākṣasas of terrible deeds were slain by Rāma single-handed, a human on foot. Out of that entire army, only Khara, the great chariot fighter, the rākṣasa Triśīrā, and Rāma, the slayer of enemies, remained. The other rākṣasas who were most valiant, fierce and formidable, were all killed in the fore of combat by Rāma, the brother of Lakṣmaṇa. When Khara saw that the mighty army had been destroyed in a major battle by the powerful Rāma, he mounted a large chariot and approached Rāma, as Indra armed with his thunderbolt would attack his enemies.

RĀMA SLAYS TRIŚIRĀ

Seeing that Khara was advancing toward Rāma, his other general, a rākṣasa of the name Triśirā, approached Khara and said: “Engage me, a valiant warrior, in this task. There is no need for you to get involved in this daring act. Just see how I shall knock down in battle the strong-armed Rāma! I swear to you on my weapon that I shall kill that Rāma who deserves to be slain by all the rākṣasas. Either I shall be His death in combat, or He will be mine. Restrain your enthusiasm for battle for a while and just watch as a judge. Either you will return to Janasthāna delighting in the death of Rāma, or you will be entering into combat with Rāma after my death.”

Khara was persuaded by Triśirā, who spoke that way out of a desire for death, and commanded him: “Go on! Fight!” Then Triśirā advanced toward Rāma. Resembling a three-peaked mountain because of his three heads, Triśirā speedily drove a shining chariot drawn by swift steeds toward Rāma. He released a tremendous shower of arrows like the torrential downpour from a big cloud and let out a deep roar like a water-soaked drum. Seeing Triśirā’s approach, Rāma greeted him with His bow firing sharp arrows. That clash between strong warriors—Rāma and Triśirā—was most tumultuous, like a fight between a lion and an elephant.

Upon being hit in the forehead with three arrows fired by Triśirā, Rāma, unable to bear the insult, became furious and said: “Oh, this rākṣasa who is courageous in warfare has such strength, and he has shot Me in the forehead with arrows that felt like flowers. Now you accept the arrows flying from the string of My bow!” Having spoken in this way, Rāma, who was excited and enraged, shot fourteen serpentine arrows into Triśirā’s chest. With four arrows with straight shafts He shot down Khara’s four horses. With eight arrows He shot down the driver seated in the chariot. With a single arrow Rāma cut off the chariot’s raised flag. Then, as the night-stalker was jumping down from his ruined chariot, Rāma shot him in the heart with arrows so that he became stunned. Out of indignation, the immeasurable

soul Rāma cut off Triśirā's three heads with three swift arrows. Being fatally wounded by Rāma's arrows and spurting blood profusely, Triśirā's body fell down where he stood on the battlefield, joining his already fallen heads.

Those rākṣasas serving Khara who survived the massacre were dismayed. They did not stay but ran away like deer frightened by a tiger. Khara was infuriated when he saw them running away and immediately halted their retreat. Then Khara madly rushed upon Rāma like the planet Rāhu eclipsing the moon.

RĀMA FIGHTS WITH KHARA

After seeing Dūṣaṇa killed on the battlefield along with Triśirā, Khara also became afraid of Rāma's prowess. Upon witnessing Rāma annihilate single-handed the mighty rākṣasa army along with Triśirā and Dūṣaṇa, the rākṣasa Khara attacked Rāma, as the demon Namuci attacked Indra. Drawing his bow forcefully, Khara shot at Rāma with blood-sucking nārāca arrows which were like angry serpents. Plucking his bow string repeatedly and exhibiting his knowledge of weapons learned through the study of martial arts, Khara, while riding on his chariot on the battle arena, employed different kinds of weapons with his arrows. That great chariot fighter filled all the directions and intermediate directions with his arrows. Seeing him doing this, Rāma lifted up His bow. Rāma covered the sky with His unbearable arrows that sparkled like fire, as Indra covers the sky with showers of rain. Due to the sharp arrows fired by Rāma and Khara, the sky was completely covered on all sides so that there was not any open space around them. The sun did not shine because it was covered with a network of arrows created by the two who were engaged in a pitched battle to kill each other. Thereafter Khara hit Rāma with steel-tipped arrows, solid steel arrows and barbed arrows, as one would train an elephant by continually jabbing it with a goad. All living beings saw Khara mounted on his chariot with bow in hand as death personified carrying a noose in his hand.

At the time, Khara thought that Rāma, who was mighty, intent on acts of heroism, and who had exterminated the entire rākṣasa army, was thoroughly exhausted. Rāma was not intimidated by seeing Khara as bold as a lion and strutting like a lion, no more than would a lion fear a rabbit. Then Khara, who was seated in a large, resplendent chariot, attacked Rāma, as a moth darts into a flame. Khara displayed his manual dexterity by cleaving with an arrow Rāma's bow and arrow near where He held these with His fist. The angry Khara again took seven more arrows as bright as Indra's thunderbolt and fired them at Rāma's vital organs. Then, after hitting Rāma, whose glory was unparalleled, with one thousand arrows, Khara roared

loudly on the battlefield. Being struck by the smooth-shafted arrows of Khara, Rāma's armor, which was resplendent like the sun, fell to the ground. When all of Rāma's limbs were hit by arrows, Rāma was infuriated and shone on the battleground like a smokeless flame.

Then Rāma strung a deep-sounding bow for putting an end to His enemies. Lifting that huge bow of Viṣṇu given to Him by the great sage Agastya, Rāma charged toward Khara. Lord Rāma then shot down the flag of Khara with gold-feathered arrows.

Split into many pieces, that attractive gold flag descended to the ground as does the sun when commanded by the gods. With four arrows Khara, who was familiar with the vulnerable parts of the body, hit Rāma's limbs, as a trainer would strike an elephant. When Rāma was struck by the many arrows shot from Khara's bow and His body was drenched with blood, He became irate. Firmly grasping His bow, Rāma, the best of bowmen, shot six well-aimed arrows. With one arrow He hit Khara's head, with two, the arms, and with three arrows tipped with crescent-shaped blades He hit Khara in the chest, so it is said. After that, Rāma shot at the rākṣasa thirteen arrows sharpened on stone that were like the sun in brilliance: with one arrow Rāma shattered the chariot's yoke; with four He downed the horses; with the sixth He cut off the head of the charioteer on the battlefield; with three He cut down the three supports of the yoke; with two, the axle; and with the twelfth, which shone like a thunderbolt, He smashed Khara's bow and arrows; with the thirteenth, Rāma, who resembled Indra, apparently laughed as He hit Khara. With his bow broken, chariot disabled, horses killed and charioteer slain, Khara then jumped down and stood on the ground holding a club in his hands. The gods and great sages who were watching from the heavens, standing in the front of their aerial vehicles, were elated and, with joined palms, glorified the great warrior Rāma's deed.

RĀMA AND KHARA EXCHANGE INSULTS

When the mighty Rāma saw that Khara had gotten down from his chariot and was holding a club, He first spoke sweetly and then harshly: “Standing in the midst of a great army of elephants, horses and chariots, you have perpetrated a horrible act despised by all people. One who oppresses other living beings, who is heartless and who commits sinful deeds cannot endure, even if he be the ruler of the three worlds. O night-stalker, everybody assaults one who performs ruthless actions detrimental to the world, as they do when a wicked snake arrives. One who does not wake up, even though committing sins out of lust or greed, but is delighted by doing so, will see his own end, as does the red-tailed brāhmaṇī lizard when it eats hail stones. O rākṣasa, what result will you get by killing the ascetics who practice righteousness while dwelling in Daṇḍakāraṇya? Even on achieving a position as ruler, one who is cruel, commits sinful deeds and is despised by the people cannot last very long, like a tree with rotten roots.

“The perpetrator of a sinful deed certainly reaps its terrible consequence, as a tree bears flowers in due time. One soon reaps the result of a sinful deed in this world, O night-stalker, as when one eats poisoned food. I have been sent by King Daśaratha to take the lives of those who commit terrible sins and who wish to harm the people. The arrows adorned with gold shot by Me will now cut through you and enter the ground, as a snake enters anthills. Being killed in combat today, you will follow with your army those practitioners of righteousness whom you devoured in the Daṇḍakā Forest. Let those great sages who were previously killed by you see you from their celestial vehicles being killed by My arrows and descended to hell. Strike as you wish and do the best you can, O worst of your race! I shall soon knock down your head like a palmyra fruit.”

Khara became infuriated and his eyes reddened when spoken to in this way by Rāma. Thereafter, while laughing, he replied to Rāma as follows: “O son of King Daśaratha, having killed ordinary rākṣasas on the field of

battle, why do You praise Yourself when You do not deserve praise? The best of men who are valorous and strong do not say anything about themselves out of self-pride. Only the vulgar, who have not mastered themselves and are a disgrace to the warrior caste uselessly brag as You do, O Rāma. What warrior would extol his own praise on the battlefield with death close at hand when there was no reason to do so? By praising Yourself You have completely revealed Your baseness, as a blazing fire reveals the falsity of fool's gold. Do You not see me standing here holding a club, immobile like a mountain replete with minerals and supporting the earth?"

"Like death holding a noose, I, with club in hand, am capable of taking Your life in combat, and even that of all the three worlds. Although I could say more about You, I shall not, for the sun is about to set, which would disrupt the fight. Fourteen thousand rākṣasas have been killed by You. By killing You I shall wipe away the tears from their relatives' eyes."

Speaking thus and being extremely angry, Khara threw at Rāma his club which blazed like a thunderbolt and was encircled with gold bands. The mighty, burning club released from the hand of Khara reduced to ashes the trees and shrubs as it approached Lord Rāma. With His arrows Rāma shatter into pieces that flaming club, even as it approached in mid air. Shattered by Rāma's arrows, the club fell to the ground, like a snake knocked down by the power of potions and spells.

RĀMA KILLS KHARA

After smashing Khara's club with His arrows, Rāma, who was fond of righteousness, smiled and spoke the following angry words: "O lowest of the rākṣasas, is this the extent of your strength? Although devoid of strength in comparison to Me, you brag pointlessly. Your vain bragging defeated your club's purpose, which is now shattered by My arrows and fallen on the ground. Even the declaration proclaimed by you that you would wipe away the tears from the eyes of the relatives of the fallen rākṣasas is proven false. I shall take away the life of you, a low, wretched and cheating rākṣasa, as Garuḍa snatched away the nectar of immortality from the gods. The earth will drink your blood mixed with foam and bubbles after I cut your throat and pierce your body with My arrows. With all the limbs of your body covered with dust and your arms severed, you will lie sleeping on the ground as if embracing a dearly coveted woman.

"When you, the vilest of rākṣasas, are lying in the sleep of death, this Daṇḍakā Forest will become a shelter for those sages who are the shelter of others. When your residence in Janasthāna has been destroyed by My arrows, sages will wander throughout that area without fear. Today rākṣasīs, who instilled fear in others, will flee out of fear, their relatives having been killed and their faces wet with tears. Today your wives, having you as their husband and being similar to you, will become familiar with the taste of sorrow after being deprived of their source of happiness. O cruel and petty-minded rākṣasa, you have been a constant thorn in the side of the brāhmaṇas. Because of you the sages have been offering oblations of clarified butter into the sacred fires with much anxiety."

Burning with ire, Khara replied with harsh words to chastise Rāma: "Certainly You are brave and fearless, even in the face of danger. Obviously You do not know that You are in the grip of death and that is why You do not know what to say and what not to say. Indeed, persons who are caught in

the noose of death do not know what is to be done and what is not to be done because their minds and senses are bewildered.”

Having spoken in that way to Rāma, the night-stalker then wrinkled his brow. He looked all around for a weapon which he could use for fighting and spied a large sāla tree not far away. Biting his upper lip with his teeth, he uprooted the tree. After pulling up the tree, he twirled it with both his hands, roared loudly, and hurled it at Rāma, shouting: “You are dead!” Rāma splintered and knocked down the tree with a shower of arrows. Then He summoned all his intense anger for slaying Khara in combat. Covered with sweat and His eyes red with anger, Rāma pierced Khara with one thousand arrows. Foaming blood flowed copiously from his arrow wounds, like streams flowing from the peak of Mount Prasravaṇa.

Agitated by the wounds from Rāma’s arrows and maddened by the smell of his own blood, Khara dashed wildly toward Rāma. Rāma, who was expert in foot movements, took two or three steps backwards in order to fire at the approaching furious rākṣasa soddened with blood. Thereafter, in order to slay Khara, Rāma grabbed an arrow which burned like fire and resembled Lord Brahmā’s rod of chastisement. Rāma placed on His bow that arrow given by the wise lord of the gods, Indra, and drew it back on the bow string. Being fired toward Khara, that arrow struck him in the chest, making a sound like a thunderclap. Being burnt by the arrow, Khara fell to the ground, as the demon Andharaka was burnt to ashes by Lord Śiva in the Śvetāraṇya Forest. As Indra killed Vṛtra with a thunderbolt, Namuci with foam and Bala with a streak of lightning, so was Khara stricken down dead.

In the meantime, the gods, joined by cāraṇas, were overjoyed. They beat kettledrums and showered down flowers on all sides, especially over Lord Rāma. They exclaimed: “In half a moment Rāma killed in a great conflict with His sharp arrows fourteen thousand rākṣasas who could change their appearance at will, including the notorious Khara and Dūṣaṇa. Oh, what a tremendous feat done by Rāma, the knower of the self! Oh, what valor and determination He has, just like Lord Viṣṇu!”

Speaking in that way, all the gods left in the same way that they had come. Then all the royal sages and great sages who had gathered there,

including Agastya, joyfully eulogized Lord Rāma as follows: “For this very purpose, the glorious Lord Indra, slayer of the demon Pāka, visited the hermitage of the sage Śarabhaṅga. You were brought to this region by the great sages to annihilate their enemies, the rākṣasas of sinful deeds. This deed has now been accomplished by You, O son of King Daśaratha. The great sages can now strictly practice their religious duties in the Daṇḍakā Forest.”

Meanwhile, the valorous Lakṣmaṇa came out of the mountain cave with Sītā, and sat down comfortably in the cottage. After the victorious Rāma had been duly honored by the great sages and offered proper respects by Lakṣmaṇa, He entered the cottage. Seeing Her husband who had slain the enemies and brought happiness to the great sages, Sītā felt great joy and embraced Him. Delighted to see the hordes of dead rākṣasas, Sītā was exhilarated to see Rāma unharmed. Her face beaming with ecstasy, Sītā again embraced Rāma, who was being praised by great sages pleased by His having slain the hordes of rākṣasas.

RĀVAṆA INFORMED ABOUT THE DEATH OF KHARA AND OTHERS

Fleeing quickly from Janasthāna and entering Laṅkā, the rākṣasa Akampana spoke the following words to Rāvaṇa with a voice quivering due to fear: “O king, many rākṣasas stationed in Janasthāna have been killed. Khara has also been slain in battle. Somehow or other I managed to come here.” The ten-headed Rāvaṇa was enraged and his eyes reddened when he heard this, and spoke to Akampana as if he would burn him with his power: “By what person whose life is now about to depart, has my formidable Janasthāna been devastated? Who has chosen to annoy me at the risk of not having any shelter in any of the worlds? On displeasing me, neither Indra, nor Kuvera, nor Yama, nor Viṣṇu can achieve any happiness. I am the death of time and can burn even fire. I can invest death itself with mortality.”

Hearing Rāvaṇa’s reply, Akampana began detailing the strength and prowess of the great soul Rāma: “He whose name is Rāma is most powerful, the best of archers, skilled in the use of divine weapons, and has reached the pinnacle of valor in battle. His younger brother Lakṣmaṇa looks similar to Rāma, is strong, has reddish eyes, a deep voice like a drum and His face is lustrous like the moon. When He is united with His brother Rāma, it is like wind with fire. Janasthāna has been laid waste by that glorious and best of warriors—Rāma. None of the demigods have come with Him. So, there is nothing to worry about in that regards. Rāma shot gold-feathered arrows which became five-headed snakes that devoured the rākṣasas. Wherever the fear-stricken rākṣasas fled, they saw Rāma standing before them. In this way, He destroyed your Janasthāna.”

Hearing what Akampana said, Rāvaṇa replied: “I shall go to Janasthāna to kill Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.” When Rāvaṇa finished saying this, Akampana replied: “Hear, O king, of the extent of Rāma’s strength and valor. Once He becomes angry no one can placate Him. With His arrows He

can arrest the flow of flooding rivers. He can pull down the vault of heaven with its stars, planets and constellations. That glorious Rāma can even lift up the sinking earth. Breaking the limits of the ocean, the all-mighty Rāma can submerge the worlds. Or, after dissolving all the worlds by His power, that illustrious and best of persons can again create all the living beings. O Rāvaṇa, Rāma cannot be defeated in combat by you, nor by the whole world of rākṣasas, as the heavenly planets cannot be attained by sinners. I do not think that Rāma can be killed even by all the demigods and demons combined together. This, however, is the means by which He can be killed. Listen to me attentively.

“His wife named Sītā is the best of beautiful women in this world. She is in the prime of youth, has a slender waist, is well-proportioned, is a jewel among women and is adorned with fine jewelry. No goddess, no gandharvī, no apsarā, and no nāga-patni is equal to Her. Indeed, how can any human woman be compared to Her? Abduct His wife by luring Him into the great forest. Without Sītā, Rāma certainly cannot live.”

Rāvaṇa, the leader of the rākṣasas, liked this suggestion. Thinking about it for a while, so they say, Rāvaṇa replied to Akampana: “All right! Tomorrow I shall go with my charioteer and gladly bring back Sītā to this great city.

The next day, Rāvaṇa sallied forth in a mule-drawn chariot that shone in all directions like the sun. That chariot of the lord of the rākṣasas shone like the moon behind a cloud as it traversed the path of the stars.

Reaching a cottage in the distance, he met Mārīca. The king was entertained by Mārīca with eatables unknown to human beings. After personally honoring Rāvaṇa and offering him a seat and water for washing the hands and feet, Mārīca politely spoke as follows: “I hope everything is well with the people of your kingdom, O monarch of the rākṣasas. However, I doubt so since you have arrived with such haste.”

When Rāvaṇa had been spoken to in this way by Mārīca, being skilled at speaking, he spoke the following: “My dear Mārīca, Rāma, who is never wearied by activity, has killed my brother Khara. Janasthāna has also

been completely destroyed in a battle. Lend your services to me for kidnapping Rāma's wife."

Hearing what the lord of the rākṣasas said, Mārīca replied as follows: "What enemy in the guise of a friend has given you this idea of kidnapping Sītā? O tiger among rākṣasas, who, after having been pleased by you, now wishes you ill? Tell me who says that Sītā should be brought to Laṅkā. Who wants to cut off the horn of the rākṣasa world? Whoever is encouraging you in this way is undoubtedly your enemy. He wishes to use you to extract a tooth from the mouth of a poisonous snake. Who has misdirected you into this wrong course of action? Who struck you in the head while you were sleeping comfortably?

"It is not good for you at present to fight in combat with that elephant in rut, Rāma, whose birth in a pure lineage is His trunk, whose glory is His ichor and whose two well-shaped arms are His tusks. You should not waken that man-lion, whose presence on the battlefield is His joints and bodily hair, who is skilled at killing beasts such as rākṣasas, whose arrows are fully His limbs and whose sword is His sharp teeth. O king of the rākṣasas, it is not prudent for you to jump into the frightful mouth of hell in the form of Rāma. He is a fathomless ocean infested with crocodiles as His bow, whose mud is the strength of His arms, whose barrage of waves are His arrows and whose waters are a fierce battle. Be pleased, O lord of Laṅkā and of rākṣasas. Please return safely to Laṅkā. Always enjoy your own wives and let Rāma enjoy His wife in the wilderness."

After Rāvaṇa had been spoken to in this way by Mārīca, he returned to the city of Laṅkā and then entered his own excellent residence.

ŚŪRPAṆAKHĀ APPROACHES RĀVAṆA

Thereafter, seeing the fourteen thousand rākṣasas of grisly deeds massacred by Rāma single-handed, as well as the slaughter of her brothers—Dūṣaṇa, Khara and Triśirā—Śūrpaṇakhā began bellowing loudly like a turbulent storm cloud. Greatly disturbed at seeing Rāma's exploits, which were impossible for anyone else to accomplish, she returned to Laṅkā, which was under the protection of Rāvaṇa. There she saw Rāvaṇa sitting in the front of his aerial vehicle, surrounded by his ministers, as Indra is surrounded by the maruts. He was seated on an exquisite throne of gold that shone like the sun. He resembled a blazing fire on a gold altar being fed with clarified butter. He was unconquerable in battle by gods, gandharvas ghosts, sages or great souls. He looked fierce like death with a gaping mouth. His body bore wounds inflicted by thunderbolts during battles between the demons and the demigods, and his chest was marked with gouges caused by the tusks of Lord Indra's elephant, Airāvata. He had twenty arms, ten heads, all kinds of attractive paraphernalia, a broad chest, and the characteristics of a king.

His complexion was the color of dark lapis-lazuli. He wore earrings of wrought gold. He had well-shaped arms, white teeth, a huge mouth, and resembled a mountain. He was struck hundreds of times by the discus of Lord Viṣṇu during the wars between the demons and the demigods, and by other weapons during great battles. With all his limbs which could not be harmed by the demigods' weapons, he stirred up the imperturbable ocean. He was quick to act. He hurled mountain peaks at the demigods and thus crushed them. He disobeyed the laws of propriety and enjoyed the wives of others. He was expert in the use of all celestial weapons and was always disrupting sacrificial performances. Upon reaching Bhogavatī, the capital city of the subterranean nāgas, he defeated their ruler Vasuki. After defeating another famous nāga named Takṣaka, Rāvaṇa abducted his dear wife. Going to Mount Kailāśa, he conquered Kuvera, the treasurer of the gods. He confiscated Kuvera's aerial vehicle called Puṣpaka, which could go

wherever the driver willed. Out of anger he destroyed Kuvera's celestial forest called Citraratha and the lotus lake that adorned it. He also destroyed the Nandana garden of Lord Indra and the pleasure gardens of the demigods. He was as big as a mountain peak and with his out-stretched arms he could obstruct the newly risen sun and moon, which could defeat any enemy.

Long ago, after practicing austerities in a forest for ten thousand years, the sober rākṣasa offered his ten heads in a sacrifice to Lord Brahmā. In lieu of this, he secured from Lord Brahmā a benediction whereby he could not be killed in battle by any demigod, demon, gandharva, witch, bird or snake, except for a human being. That powerful rākṣasa would confiscate the holy soma liquor consecrated with sacred hymns by the twice-born brāhmaṇa priests during the execution of sacrifices. That vile killer of brāhmaṇas used to interrupt sacrifices as they were about to be completed. He committed all kinds of horrible deeds. He was uncivil, merciless and engaged in activities that were detrimental to living beings in general. The rākṣasī saw her most powerful brother, the lord of the rākṣasas, the best of the Paulastya Dynasty, who caused all living beings to cry and who was a cause of terror for all the worlds. He was dressed in celestial garments and ornaments and was adorned with a heavenly flower garland. Seated comfortably upon his throne, he looked like death personified. Rāvaṇa, the destroyer of enemies, was surrounded by his ministers. Approaching him, the rākṣasī, being overwhelmed with fear, began to speak. Exhibiting her mutilations inflicted by the great soul Lakṣmaṇa, out of fear and delusion, Śūrpaṇakhā, who previously roamed about fearlessly, spoke the following exceptionally harsh words to Rāvaṇa, whose big eyes were burning.

ŚŪRPAṆAKHĀ CHIDES RĀVAṆA

Angry as she was, the troubled Śūrpaṇakhā harshly addressed in the midst of his ministers, Rāvaṇa, who caused the whole world to wail: “Being deluded, attached to sense gratification and uncontrolled, you do not see the terrible danger that has arisen. The citizens do not esteem a king who is attached to base enjoyments and acts as he pleases, anymore than they do the funeral pyre in a crematorium. That king who does not personally attend to his affairs comes to ruin, along with his kingdom and his affairs. People shun at a distance a king who does not engage spies, makes himself inaccessible to the public and lacks self-reliance, just as elephants shun the mud in rivers. Kings who do not reclaim lost territory are considered unsuccessful, like mountains sunken beneath the sea. Having instigated contention with the gods, gandharvas and demons, how do you expect to remain king without spies and being as fickle as you are? You are quite childish and brainless, O rākṣasa. You do not know what you should know, therefore how will you be able to retain your position as king?

“O greatest of victors, those rulers of men whose followers, treasuries and policies are not under their control are just like ordinary men. Monarchs are able to see everything going on in distant places by means of spies; therefore they are called far-seeing. I think you must not have any spies and are surrounded by incompetent advisors since you are unaware that Janasthāna and its residents have all been destroyed. Fourteen thousand rākṣasas of cruel deeds, including Khara and Dūṣaṇa, have been slaughtered by Rāma single-handed. Rāma, who is never tired by action, has offered the sages protection, secured the Daṇḍakā Forest and devastated Janasthāna. You, however, are lusty, deluded and dependent on unqualified persons so that you are unaware of the danger that has arisen in your own kingdom. No one will run to the assistance of a king who is harsh, miserly, careless, proud and devious. Even his own people will kill a king in difficulties when he is too puffed-up, unacceptable and conceited.

“A king who does not attend to his affairs and does not fear danger soon looses his kingdom, is reduced to wretchedness and is considered the same as straw fallen on the public roads. Dry wood may have some use, even stones and dust, but monarchs who have fallen from their positions have no use whatsoever. Just as worn-out clothes or a crushed flower garland are useless, so also is a king who looses his kingdom. That king who is vigilant, all-knowing, self-controlled, grateful and of a righteous nature will reign for a long time. That king who while in a deep sleep can see with the eyes of wisdom and who dispenses anger and mercy appropriately is respected by the people. You, however, are a fool devoid of these qualities, for your spies do not know about the horrendous massacre of rākṣasas. Being disrespectful to others, attached to sense gratification, unfamiliar with the skill of acting according to time and place and having never applied your intelligence to understanding the good or bad of a thing, your reign will be terminated and you will soon perish.”

Examining with his intelligence his weaknesses as mentioned by Śūrpaṇakhā, Rāvaṇa, the most glorious ruler of the night-stalkers, possessing as he did wealth, pride and physical strength, thought for a long time.

ŚŪRPAṆAKHĀ INDUCES RĀVAṆA TO KIDNAP SĪTĀ

Rāvaṇa was very annoyed to see Śūrpaṇakhā speaking to him so harshly in the midst of his ministers and replied as follows: “Who is Rāma? What is His strength? What does He look like? How great is His prowess? And why has He entered the Daṇḍakā Forest which is so impassable? What weapon does Rāma have with which He killed in combat the rākṣasas, including Khara, Dūṣaṇa and Triśirā?”

Śūrpaṇakhā was beside herself with anger on being spoken to in this way by Rāvaṇa and proceeded to relate the facts about Rāma: “Possessing long arms and broad eyes, wearing bark cloth and the skins of black antelopes, Rāma, the son of Kind Daśaratha, is equal to Cupid. Holding a bow decorated with gold bands and which is as brilliant as a rainbow, He shoots gleaming steel arrows that are like poisonous snakes. I could not see when Rāma placed the frightful arrows on the string, when He pulled the bow string back or when He fired the sharp-tipped arrows. I could only see the rākṣasa army being slaughtered by a shower of arrows, as good crops are destroyed with hailstones by Indra, the controller of the rains.

“Fourteen thousand rākṣasas of terrifying forms—including Khara and Dūṣaṇa—were slain by Him single-handed on foot with His sharp arrows in an hour and a half. He has given protection to the sages and secured the Daṇḍakā Forest. I alone managed to escape somehow or other, after being disgraced by the great soul Rāma, who is hesitant to kill a woman. His valiant brother named Lakṣmaṇa is most glorious, equal to Rāma in prowess because of His qualities and is attached to and devoted to Him. Intolerant, undefeatable, victorious, heroic, intelligent and strong, Lakṣmaṇa is always at the right hand of Rāma, like the external manifestation of Rāma’s life.

“Rāma’s dear wife, wedded according to religious principles, has broad eyes and a face resembling the full moon. She is always engaged in doing what is pleasing to Her husband. With Her fine hair, shapely nose and thighs, and pleasant appearance, the illustrious woman is like the presiding goddess of the forest or a second goddess of fortune, Lakṣmī. Having a complexion like molten gold, reddish nails and a slender waist, this beautiful and elegant woman named Sītā is the daughter of King Janaka. I have never before seen on this earth a woman of such beauty, whether a goddess, a gandharvī, a yakṣiṇī, or a kinnarī.

“Whoever happens to be the husband of Sītā and whom She embraces lovingly must live better than anyone else in all these worlds, including Indra. She is good-natured, of praiseworthy form and of unmatched beauty in this world. She would be an ideal consort for you, and you, the perfect husband for Her. I was attempting to bring that lovely woman with broad hips and large, rounded breasts so that She could be your wife. I was deformed by the cruel Lakṣmaṇa, O strong-armed one. Indeed, if you were to see Sītā’s face shining like a full moon, you would become a target for Cupid’s arrows. If you have any desire to have Her as your wife, may you soon raise your right foot to begin your quest for victory. If, O lord of the rākṣasas, you are at all pleased with what I have said, then let my advice be carried out without hesitation. Recognizing your own strength and the weakness of these humans, forcibly abduct Sītā as your wife. Having heard about the massacre of the night-stalkers of Janasthāna by the arrows of Rāma, including Khara and Dūṣaṇa, you should immediately undertake your duty.”

RĀVAṆA VISITS MĀRĪCA

After hearing Śūrpaṇakhā's hair-raising tale, Rāvaṇa, realizing what his duty was, dismissed his ministers and departed, so it is said. Thinking about how to realize the kidnapping of Sītā, He began considering the merits and demerits of the plan, as well as his own strengths and weaknesses. At last he decided that he would do it. When his intelligence was fixed on attaining that goal, he left for his chariot shed. The leader of the rākṣasas furtively reached the chariot shed and instructed his charioteer: "Get my chariot ready." In a short while the charioteer, who was fleet-footed, readied an excellent chariot that was liked by him. Rāvaṇa mounted the golden chariot which could go wherever one willed. It was encrusted with jewels and drawn by mules with heads like goblins. The glorious Rāvaṇa, the younger half-brother of Kuvera, drove that chariot that rumbled like a thundercloud toward the ocean.

Rāvaṇa was being fanned with a white yak-tail whisk and shaded with a white parasol. His complexion was like glossy vaidurya gem and he wore earrings of wrought gold. He had ten heads and twenty arms and was decorated with attractive paraphernalia. That enemy of the gods and murderer of sages was like a colossal mountain with ten peaks. As he rode in his chariot, the lord of the rākṣasas shone magnificently, like a dark cloud encircled with lighting being crossed by a flock of herons. As he advanced, he saw the sea coast lined with mountains and mantled with thousands of trees bearing many different flowers and fruits.

All along the coast were lotus ponds filled with clear, cool water, and spacious grounds of hermitages with altars. It looked most beautiful with its groves of bananas and coconuts, as well as sāla, tāla, tamāla and other types of trees in full bloom. It was adorned with thousands of nāgas, suparṇas and kinnaras, who strictly controlled their eating. It was also adorned with many perfected beings and cāraṇas who had subdued their desires. Thousands of celestial nymphs of unearthly beauty were wearing heavenly flower garlands

and ornaments. They were well-acquainted with the manner of realizing amorous pastimes. It was frequented by the graceful wives of the demigods who were enveloped with splendor, and by hosts of gods and demons who quaff the nectar of immortality. There were flocks of swans, herons, cranes and frogs. Pieces of vaidurya gem were scattered everywhere and the ground was pleasant and soft due to the influence of the ocean.

Rāvaṇa saw on all sides spacious aerial vehicles of whitish hue that were decorated with shimmering garlands and provided with instrumental music. These belonged to those who had attained the heavenly planets by dint of their austerities. He also saw gandharvas and apsarās. He saw thousands of sandalwood trees whose roots exuded a fragrant resin, and nice forests that were pleasing to smell. There were large forests of aguru and groves of fragrant takkola trees laden with fruits. There were flowers of tamāla trees and climbing shrubs of black pepper. Along the shoreline heaps of pearls were drying in the sun. There were piles of conchshells and coral, as well as mounds of gold and silver all over. There were pleasant springs, and lakes too. Cities could be seen with ample supplies of food grains and wealth, and which were beautified by the presence of the best of women and crowded with elephants, horses and chariots. Then Rāvaṇa saw on the shore of the ocean a level piece of land that was just like heaven and which was fanned with breezes that were delightful and soft to the touch.

He also saw there a banyan tree that resembled a massive cloud. Its branches extended out for one hundred yojanas and was surrounded by sages. Once the mighty Garuḍa landed on one of this tree's branches while carrying an elephant and a gigantic tortoise which he was going to devour. The fine-feathered eagle Garuḍa broke that branch thick with foliage all of a sudden due to his excessive weight. Below were gathered great sages of different orders, such as vaikhānasas, māśas, vāḷakhilyas, marīcipās and dhūmrās. Out of compassion for those ascetics, Garuḍa caught the branch, which was one hundred yojanas long and quickly carried it away. As he did so, he devoured the flesh of both the elephant and the tortoise. Dropping that branch, he devastated the territory of the niṣāḍas. After rescuing the great sages, Garuḍa experienced unequalled joy. By this feat his valor increased twofold. Thus he decided to get for himself some of the nectar of immortality kept by the gods. Smashing the iron mesh and demolishing the

jewelled shrine, he secretly carried off the pot of nectar of immortality from the palace of Lord Indra. Rāvaṇa, a younger half-brother of Kuvera, saw that banyan tree, known by the name Subhadra, to which sages resorted for shelter and which still showed signs of the damage wrought by Garuḍa.

Upon reaching the other shore of the ocean, Rāvaṇa saw a hermitage in an isolated, charming and holy part of the forest. There he saw the rākṣasa named Mārīca who was living on a meager diet. He was wearing the skin of a black antelope and wore his matted hair tied in a bun atop his head. When Rāvaṇa arrived, he was entertained by the rākṣasa Mārīca according to custom with all kinds of delights unknown to humans. After being personally entertained with food and water, Mārīca spoke the following words which were conducive to well-being: “O king, O ruler of the rākṣasas, I hope everything is well in Laṅkā. For what reason have you returned here again so quickly?” Being questioned in this way by Mārīca, Rāvaṇa, who was invested with tremendous glory, replied in the following way, expert as he was in speaking.

RĀVAṆA ASKS FOR MĀRĪCA'S HELP

Rāvaṇa said: “My dear Mārīca, listen to what I have to say. I am distressed and you are my ultimate shelter when I am in such a condition. You know Janasthāna, where my brothers Khara, the strong-armed Dūṣaṇa, my sister Śūrpaṇakhā and the flesh-eating Triśīrā, as well as many other night-stalking rākṣasa warriors eager for battle permanently reside by my command. They harassed the ascetics in the great forest that were practicing their religious duties. Those fourteen thousand rākṣasa warriors committed heinous crimes, and, encouraged by their success, followed the whims of Khara. While living there in Janasthāna, those exceptionally powerful fighters, with Khara as their leader and armed with many kinds of weapons, had an encounter with Rāma on the battlefield. Rāma, who was consumed with rage, used His bow and arrows at the fore of the battle without uttering any harsh words.

“Fourteen thousand rākṣasas of fearsome potency were slain by the sharp arrows of a human standing on foot. Khara was slaughtered in combat, and Dūṣaṇa was also felled, as was Triśīrā. Thus the Daṇḍakā Forest was made safe for the sages. The renegade warrior Rāma, who was exiled with His wife by His angry father, has destroyed that army. He is misbehaved, hard-hearted, severe, foolish, lusty and lacking control of His senses. He has abandoned all propriety, is the lowest of persons and is intent on harming all living beings. Although she showed no hostility, my sister was disfigured in the forest by Rāma, who was dependent on His own ability and who cut off her nose and ears.

“I shall bring from Janasthāna His wife Sītā, who is like a daughter of a demigod. Be my assistant in this endeavor. With you standing at my side as my helper and my other brothers, such as Kumbhakarṇa, I do not consider even all the gods as a threat on the battlefield. Be my helper, for you are quite capable of it, O rākṣasa. No one is equal to you in prowess,

combat or martial pride. You are a great warrior, expert in devising schemes and plots, and skilled in the deployment of all types of magical trickery.

“This is the reason for which I have come to see you, O night-stalker. Listen to the role which you will play as my assistant in accordance with my request. Assuming the guise of a golden deer covered with silver spots, pass in front of Sītā and Rāma at Their cottage. Seeing you in the form of a deer, Sītā will undoubtedly ask Her husband and Lakṣmaṇa to capture you. Then, in Rāma’s and Lakṣmaṇa’s absence, I shall easily abduct the lone Sītā without any interference, as the planet Rāhu eclipses the brilliance of the moon. After that, when Rāma is weakened by the abduction of His wife, I shall strike Him down with ease and confidence, my mind then being satisfied with the attainment of my goal.”

Upon hearing about the great soul Rāma, Mārīca’s mouth became dry and he was gripped with fear. Licking his dry lips, he stared at Rāvaṇa with unblinking eyes as if he were dead. With joined palms, Mārīca, whose mind was frightened and disturbed because he was personally familiar with Rāma’s prowess in the wilderness, spoke the following truthful words that were beneficial to Rāvaṇa and also to himself.

MĀRĪCA TRIES TO DISSUADE RĀVAṆA

Mārīca being very wise, after hearing what Rāvaṇa had requested, replied as follows to the lord of the rākṣasas: “It is easy to find people who always speak pleasant words. One who speaks words that though unpleasant are beneficial is hard to find. Because you have not used spies and are fickle, you are surely unfamiliar with Rāma, who possesses exceptional valor and other outstanding qualities, and who is equal to Indra and Varuṇa. As such, let there be good fortune for all the rākṣasas on the face of the earth, my friend. Let not the enraged Rāma rid the world of rākṣasas. Better that Sītā had not been born for bringing your life to an end. I hope that on Sītā’s account no great calamity befalls us. I hope that, having obtained you as its leader, as lusty and uncontrolled as you are, the city of Laṅkā and its rākṣasa inhabitants will not perish along with you. A less intelligent king who is lusty, misbehaved and sinful-minded like you destroys himself, his followers and his kingdom.

“Rāma has not been rejected by His father, nor has He gone beyond the scope of morality in any way. He is not greedy, nor of bad character, nor has He disgraced the warrior caste. He is not devoid of piety and good qualities and He increases the delight of His mother Kausalyā. He is not severe, nor is He intent on harming all living beings. Seeing His father deceived by Kaikeyī, the righteous son departed for the forest for the purpose of proving the veracity of His father’s promise. For the fulfillment of Kaikeyī’s cherished aim, as well as of His father King Daśaratha, He renounced the kingdom and its royal enjoyments and entered the Daṇḍakā Forest. Rāma is not hard-hearted, my friend, nor is He ignorant, nor with uncontrolled senses. He has never been accused of falsehood, nor should you do so. Rāma is the personification of righteousness. He is saintly and of unfailing prowess. He is the king of the whole world, as Indra is of the gods. How do you expect to forcibly abduct Sītā, when She is protected by Her Own glory, as the sun is by its effulgence?

“You should not enter into the uncontained blazing fire on the battleground in the form of Rāma, whose arrows are the flames and whose bow and sword are the fuel. You should not give up your kingdom, happiness and dear life by drawing near to death personified as Rāma, whose bow is His wide-open blazing mouth and whose arrows are his rays. He is irritated, is carrying a bow and noose, is valiant and is capable of destroying His enemy’s army. Immeasurable is the glory of He who has Sītā as His wife. You are not capable of kidnapping Her while She is protected in the forest by Rāma’s bow. That lovely lady is the wife of that lion among men who has a chest like a lion’s. She is dearer to Him than His own life and is always devoted to Him. The slender-waisted Sītā is the beloved wife of a powerful man and cannot be overcome anymore than the blazing flames of a conflagration. What do you hope to achieve by embarking on this hopeless enterprise, O leader of the rākṣasas? If He ever sees you on a battlefield, that will be the end of your life. If you wish to enjoy for a long time life, happiness and the kingdom, which are so difficult to achieve, do not offend Rāma. After consulting with all your virtuous advisors headed by Vibhīṣaṇa, decide for yourself. You should consider the merits and demerits of this plan, as well as your own strengths and weaknesses. You should honestly recognize your own strength and that of Rāma. Considering what is beneficial and disadvantageous, you should do what is best. I, for my part, think that direct combat with Rāma will not be expedient. Listen again, O ruling lord of the night-stalkers, to this deliberation which is excellent, appropriate and logical.”

MĀRĪCA NARRATES HIS ENCOUNTER WITH RĀMA

Mārīca said: “Once, I used to wander the face of the earth due to my valor. I had the strength of one thousand elephants and was like a mountain. My complexion was like a dark blue storm cloud. I wore earrings of wrought gold. On my head I wore a crown and in my hands I carried a club studded with iron spikes. I instilled fear into the hearts of people by wandering throughout the Daṇḍakā forest devouring the flesh of sages. Then it so happened that the great sage Viśvāmitra, being very afraid of me, personally went to King Daśaratha and made the following request: ‘Let Rāma protect me with full attention while I am presently performing a sacrifice. O monarch, a terrible calamity has befallen me because of the demon Mārīca.’

“After being petitioned in this way, the great soul King Daśaratha replied to the highly fortunate sage Viśvāmitra: ‘This boy Rāma is less than twelve years old and has not yet completed his training in the use of weapons. I and my army shall gladly accompany you. With my army of four divisions—elephants, cavalry, chariots and infantry—I shall slay your enemy, the night-prowling rākṣasa, as desired by you, O best of ascetics.’ Having received this reply from the king, the sage spoke as follows: ‘Except for Rāma, there is no one in this world powerful enough to deal with that rākṣasa, even though you had previously protected the demigods on many battlefields. O king, your deeds are known throughout the three worlds. Even though you have a great army, O crusher of enemies, let it remain here. Although only a boy, Rāma has tremendous capacity and can defeat the rākṣasa. Taking Him, I shall depart. May all be well with you, O chastiser of enemies.’

“Having said this, the sage Viśvāmitra, being highly delighted, departed for his hermitage, bringing the prince with him. Then, while the sage was consecrated for performing a sacrifice in the Daṇḍakā Forest, Rāma stood nearby and plucked His wonderful bow. The features of manhood had

not yet appeared in Rāma's body, which was full of splendor. His eyes were shaped like the petals of a lotus blossom. He wore a single piece of cloth and carried a bow. He wore His hair tied in a knot on top of His head and wore a gold necklace. He therefore looked like the newly risen waxing moon. Then I, looking like a dark cloud and wearing earrings of smelted gold, entered the sage's hermitage because of my pride over a boon which I had received. As soon as I entered the hermitage, He saw me and suddenly picked up His bow. Seeing me, He strung His bow calmly. I ignored Rāma, thinking that He was just a boy, and madly rushed toward the sacrificial fire altar of Viśvāmitra. Rāma shot a sharp arrow capable of destroying an enemy. On being struck by that arrow, I was thrown into the ocean that was at a distance of one hundred yojanas. I was spared at that time by the warrior because He did not care to kill me. By the force of the impact of Rāma's arrow I was knocked unconscious and thrown down into the depths of the ocean. Regaining consciousness after a long time, my dear friend, I returned to the city of Laṅkā. In this way, I was set free, whereas my companions were annihilated by the boy Rāma, who had not yet completed His training in the use of weapons and who never tires in the discharge of activities.

“If, despite being prohibited by me, you enter into combat with Rāma, O Rāvaṇa, you will quickly meet with a terrible misfortune. You will also bring suffering and misfortune to these rākṣasas who are attached to the activities of love sports and who revel in social festivities. You will see the city of Laṅkā with its palaces and mansions adorned with varieties of gems destroyed on account of Sītā. Even those who are pure by not committing sin, by association with sinners, are destroyed by their great sins, like a fish in a lake infested with snakes. You will see rākṣasas whose bodies are smeared with celestial sandalwood paste and adorned with shimmering ornaments lying dead on the ground because of your fault. You will see the surviving night-stalkers running in all directions without any protector, some having had their wives taken away and others fleeing with their wives. You will surely see Laṅkā covered with a blanket of arrows and completely enveloped in blazing fire, its buildings being ravaged by the conflagration.

“There is certainly no greater sin than union with another's wife. You have thousands of young ladies in your harem, O king. Be satisfied with your own wives and thus protect your family, the rākṣasas, your honor, your

wealth, your kingdom and your own dear live. If you wish to continue enjoying with your lovely wives and bosom friends, do not commit any offence against Rāma. If, after having been forbidden by me, your well-wisher, you forcibly abduct Sītā, your army will be destroyed and you will attain the abode of the lord of death along with all your relatives and associates, being killed by the arrows of Rāma.”

MĀRĪCA CONTINUES TRYING TO DISSUADE RĀVAṆA

Mārīca continued: “As I mentioned earlier, I was somehow or other set free in that encounter with Rāma. Now listen to what happened latter and which was entirely uncommon. Not being depressed by my previous bad experience with Rāma, I entered Daṇḍakāraṇya with two rākṣasas who assumed the forms of stags. I also wandered throughout Daṇḍakāraṇya as a large-bodied flesh-eating stag with a blazing tongue and sharp fangs. O Rāvaṇa, as wicked as I was, I wandered about attacking the ascetics as they engaged in performing fire sacrifices, as they bathed on the banks of holy rivers and as they took shelter under sacred trees. Butchering those practitioners of religious principles in the Daṇḍakā Forest, I drank their blood and ate their flesh. Devouring the flesh of sages and frightening the forest dwellers by my cruelty, I wandered about intoxicated from drinking blood as the very adversary of religiosity.

“At that time I came upon Rāma living as an ascetic, who was engaged in carrying out His prescribed duties. He was accompanied by that most fortunate descendant of the Vaideha Dynasty, Sītā, and by that great chariot fighter, Lakṣmaṇa. Practicing austerities and following a restricted diet of harmless foods, Rāma was intent on achieving the welfare of all living beings. I despised the mighty Rāma, who had resorted to the forest. Considering Him to be nothing more than an ascetic and remembering my enmity with Him, I rushed upon Him wrathfully with the form of a sharp-horned stag. Out of sheer foolishness I wanted to kill Him, remembering the blow I had received from His arrow. Pulling back His bow with full force, He released three sharp arrows which traversed the air like Garuḍa and which could strike down any enemy. Those three straight-shafted arrows which drink the blood of their targets approached all together. Knowing as I did the prowess of Rāma and having already seen the danger posed by His arrows, I fled away from there and thus escaped, whereas the other two

rākṣasas were slain. Somehow or other I had escaped Rāma's arrows and gotten back my life.

“After that, giving up all my previous habitual activities, I engaged myself in the practice of penances with a controlled mind. In every single tree I see Rāma dressed in bark cloth and the skin of a black antelope. Holding a bow, He looks like the lord of death with a noose in his hand. O Rāvaṇa, out of fear I even see thousands of Rāmas. To me this whole forest seems to have become Rāma. I even see Rāma when I am completely alone, O ruler of the rākṣasas. When I see Rāma in my dreams, I become bewildered like one who has lost consciousness. Because of my fear of Rāma, names which begin with the letter “r,” such as ratna (jewel) and ratha (chariot), frighten me, O Rāvaṇa. I am fully aware of His ability. It is not good for you to fight with Him. Rāma, the delight of the Raghu Dynasty, can certainly slay the demons Bali and Namuci. Go and fight with Rāma in combat, but please excuse me. Do not so much as mention Rāma if you wish to see me.

“Many saintly persons in this world who were engaged in the practice of righteousness perished along with their associates due to the offences of others. O night-stalker, I shall surely perish because of your offence. Do whatever is agreeable to you. I, however, shall not follow you, for Rāma has tremendous prowess, intellect and strength. Let not Rāma be the annihilator of the race of rākṣasas! If Khara residing in Janasthāna was killed some time ago by Rāma because he overstepped his limits on account of Śūrpaṇakhā, tell me truthfully how that was Rāma's fault? If you do not accept these words spoken by me for the benefit of you, my relative, then when you are struck by the straight-shooting arrows of Rāma, you and your relatives will give up your lives on the battlefield.”

RĀVAṆA CHASTISES MĀRĪCA

Despite being advised by Mārīca, Rāvaṇa did not accept his expedient and just words, anymore than a dying man bothers to accept medicine. Impelled by destiny, the ruler of the rākṣasas replied to Mārīca with curt and unwise words: “O Mārīca, the indiscreet advice that you have given me is certainly useless, like seeds scattered on barren soil. You are unable to deter me with words from engaging in warfare against Rāma, who is sinful by nature, a fool and specifically a human being. I must in your presence steal away Sītā who is more dear to Him than His own life air and then defeat Him in a confrontation. For, upon hearing the worthless words of a woman, He abandoned His own mother and father, kingdom and dear friends, and all of a sudden came to this wilderness, whereupon He slaughtered my brother Khara. My mind is firmly resolved in this regards, O Mārīca, and cannot be deterred by Indra, nor by all the gods and demons.

“When you were questioned regarding the merits and demerits of this plan, as well as the means of accomplishing it and the risks involved, after deliberating on the matter, you should have said: ‘A wise advisor who seeks his own self-aggrandizement from a king should address him with joined palms raised to the head. A king should be addressed sweetly with words that are favorable, beneficial, auspicious and respectful. A king desirous of honor would not care for that advice offered disrespectfully and impertinently, even though it be beneficial. A king possessing immeasurable vigor assumes five roles, those of Agni, Indra, Soma, Varuṇa and Yama. Great-souled kings possess these deities’ corresponding qualities of severity, prowess, gentleness, chastisement and benevolence. For that reason, a monarch is worthy of honor and respect in all circumstances. You, however, being ignorant of your duty and only attached to your delusions, have slighted me because of your depravity by addressing me, your guest, in a rude manner. I am not asking you about the merits and demerits of my plan, nor about what is best for me, O rākṣasa. My request to you of immeasurable prowess is this, that you should assist me in this great

undertaking. Listen to the role you will have to play by my command. Becoming a golden deer dappled with silvery spots, enter the yard of the hermitage and stroll before Rāma and Sītā. After enticing Sītā, you may go wherever you wish.

“Seeing you as a magical golden deer and being struck with wonder, She will immediately ask Rāma to bring you to Her. When you have drawn Rāma off into the distance, call out in a voice identical to Rāma’s: ‘O Sītā! O Lakṣmaṇa!’ When Lakṣmaṇa hears this, being implored by Sītā, He will hurriedly follow Rāma’s trail out of affection for Him. When Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are both absent from the hermitage, I shall easily abduct Sītā, as the thousand-eyed Indra takes his own consort Śacī. After accomplishing this task, go wherever you please, O rākṣasa. I shall present you with half of my kingdom, O Mārīca of noble vows. Embark on this fortunate path to achieve this goal, My dear friend. I shall follow you to Daṇḍakāraṇya in my chariot. Having tricked Rāma and gained Sītā without a struggle, I shall return with you to Laṅkā, my purpose having been attained. If you do not do this, Mārīca, I shall kill you this very day. You will have to do this deed, even if by force. One who is opposed to the king cannot live at ease. By approaching Rāma, your life will be in danger, but by defying me you will be killed by me very shortly. Thinking about these points with your good intelligence, do what you know to be best for you.”

MĀRĪCA FURTHER ADVISES RĀVAṆA

Mārīca, who had been commanded by Rāvaṇa in the manner of a king to do something repugnant, replied brusquely to the king: “What sinful-acting person advised you in this way which will bring about your destruction, as well as that of your sons, kingdom and ministers, O night-stalker? Who is that sinful wretch who is not pleased by your happiness, O king? Who has opened the door of death for you by giving you this advice? Obviously your enemy rākṣasas who are devoid of prowess want to see you defeated by a great force and annihilated. What wretch has given you such ill advice? He wants you to perish by your own actions, O night-stalker. Your ministers who never try to restrain you from embarking on a wrong path, O Rāvaṇa, deserve to be executed, yet they have not been. A king given to lustiness who has taken up a wicked life-style should be stopped by upright ministers in all circumstances. Although you should have been curbed, you have not been. By the mercy of their masters, ministers achieve righteousness, financial amelioration, enjoyment and fame, O topmost of victors. In the opposite case, however, everything becomes useless. Other people meet with adversity due to the faults of their master. The king is the source of duty and victory, O great conqueror. Therefore, kings should be protected in all circumstances.

“A kingdom cannot be protected by a king who is severe, adverse or unmannerly, O rākṣasa. Ministers who give severe advice suffer the same result as the king, as a charioteer driving speedily on a rough road perishes with his chariot. Many saintly persons in this world who were engaged in the practice of righteousness have perished with their followers on account of the offences of others. O Rāvaṇa, the people do not prosper under a king who is adverse and severe, anymore than would sheep under the protection of a jackal. Surely all these rākṣasas will perish with you as their leader, because of your being hard-hearted, unintelligent and without control of the senses. Although I have already previously met with this terrible calamity in the shape of Rāma, now you are to be pitied because you will be destroyed

along with your army. After slaying me, Rāma will shortly thereafter slay you. I will have accomplished my purpose if I am killed by my enemy Rāma. You can understand me to be dead the moment I spy Rāma. You should know yourself to be already killed along with all your relatives the very moment you kidnap Sītā. If you abduct Sītā from the hermitage with my assistance, neither you, nor I, nor Laṅkā, nor the rākṣasas will survive. Though being restrained by me, you do not heed my friendly advice, O night-stalker. Indeed, those whose time has expired and are on the verge of death do not accept guidance, not even from a well-wisher.

MĀRĪCA ASSUMES THE FORM OF A GOLDEN DEER

When Mārīca finished speaking to Rāvaṇa, feeling disturbed with fear of that lord of the rākṣasas, he said: “Let us go. As soon as I am seen by Rāma, who holds His weapons raised to kill me, my life will be finished. By making a show of valor to Rāma, no one can return alive. He is a suitable match for you who are already killed by the rod of the lord of death. When your mind is so wicked, what can I do? Here I go, my dear friend. Good luck to you, O night-stalker.”

Rāvaṇa was delighted to hear these words. Tightly embracing Mārīca, Rāvaṇa remarked: “Your statements are full of heroism and in agreement with my wishes. Now you are the real Mārīca. Previously you were someone else. Let us quickly mount this chariot adorned with gems and drawn by mules with heads like goblins. Having attracted Sītā’s attention, go wherever you wish. When Sītā is alone I shall forcibly abduct Her.”

Then Rāvaṇa and Mārīca mounted the chariot that was like an aerial ship and hurriedly left the vicinity of Mārīca’s hermitage. Travelling in this way, they saw towns, cities, forests, mountains, rivers and all the intervening countries. After some time they reached the Daṇḍakā Forest and saw Rāma’s cottage. Thereupon Rāvaṇa got down from his gold-encrusted chariot, grabbed Mārīca by the hand and said: “Here you see the place of Rāma’s cottage which is surrounded by banana trees. Quickly do what we have come for, my friend.” Hearing Rāvaṇa’s request, the rākṣasa Mārīca at once became a stag and wandered back and forth at the entrance of Rāma’s hermitage, so it is said. The rākṣasa had instantly assumed a form which was truly amazing to see.

He had become a most beautiful stag. His antlers' tips were like sapphires. His face was partly light and partly dark. His snout was the color of a red lotus flower. His ears resembled the petals of a blue lotus flower. His slightly raised neck was the color of a blue lotus. His stomach was as effulgent as a jasmine flower, the moon or lightning. His flanks were pale like the madhūka flower. The creature himself shone like the filaments of a lotus blossom. His hoofs looked like vaidurya gem. His body and legs were firm. The tip of his tail shimmered with the colors of a rainbow. The stag was captivating and was a glossy color covered with spots resembling many different gems. Having assumed an amazing form glittering with the colors of different minerals in order to fascinate Sītā, the rākṣasa began to roam fearlessly, grazing in the open meadows and illuminating the forest region around Rāma's cottage.

Having assumed a charming appearance covered with hundreds of silvery spots, the rākṣasa roved about nibbling on the tender buds of tree twigs. After entering the grove of banana trees, he then entered the grove of karṇikāra trees. He adopted a slow pace of movement in order that Sītā might see him. The back of that large stag shone very beautifully like a red lotus flower. He wandered as he pleased near the area of Rāma's cottage. In his ramblings, that excellent stag would come and go. He would disappear one moment and suddenly reappear. After playing for some time, he would then sit down on the ground. Reaching the entrance of the cottage compound, he entered into the herd of deer that were there. The rākṣasa in the guise of a stag, desiring to catch Sītā's attention, once again returned, followed by the herd of deer. Dashing about, he ran in circles. Seeing and smelling him when he drew near, all the other deer that grazed in that forest fled in all directions. Although the rākṣasa was accustomed to killing deer, he refrained from devouring them while in close contact to conceal his true nature.

At that time, the lovely-eyed Sītā, who was picking flowers, came out on this side of the aśoka, karṇikāra, and mango trees. Sītā, Her face looking very pretty, strolled here and there picking flowers. That extraordinary woman, who did not deserve to be exiled in the forest, saw that jewel-like stag with all his limbs marked with spots resembling pearls. With Her eyes wide with wonder, She gazed affectionately at that stag's

charming teeth and lips and his fur glistening like silver and other minerals. Also looking at the beloved consort of Lord Rāma, the magical stag again began roaming about, illuminating the forest. Seeing that stag whose body was composed of numerous gems, the likes of which had never been seen before, Sītā was entirely astonished.

RĀMA PURSUES THE STAG

Upon seeing that stag whose flanks gleamed with the hues of silver and gold, Sītā, whose bodily limbs were perfectly proportioned and whose complexion was like molten gold, stopped picking flowers and called out to Her husband and to Lakṣmaṇa bearing a bow. On being called by Sītā, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa surveyed the area and then saw the stag. Lakṣmaṇa was filled with suspicion when He saw the stag and said to Rāma: “I think this deer is actually the rākṣasa Mārīca. Many kings who were hunting animals in the forest have been slain by this sinful rākṣasa using different disguises, for he is capable of assuming any form he wishes. This dazzling form of a magical stag is the creation of that demon who is conversant with the art of illusion, like the mirage of a city floating in the sky. O Rāma, there is definitely no such deer with jewel-like spots in this world. It is undoubtedly an illusion.”

As Lakṣmaṇa was speaking, Sītā, who was completely captivated by the stag, interrupted Him by speaking to Lord Rāma with a brilliant smile: “O nobleman, that charming stag has captivated My mind. Bring it here, O mighty-armed one. It will make a fitting plaything. On the grounds of our hermitage graze many deer of pious appearance, such as sṛmaras and cāmaras, as well as bears, herds of spotted deer, monkeys and kinnara deer, which are most beautiful and fascinating. O king, I have never before seen a stag equal to this one in hue, dalliance or splendor. This stag whose body is dappled with variegated colors and gem-like spots is illuminating the forest in front of me, shining like the moon. Oh, what beauty! What splendor! How lovely are the sounds it makes! This magnificent dappled stag has captured my heart. It would be wonderful if You could catch that stag alive. It would be amazing. When Our exile in the forest is over and We are again in the royal palace, this stag would be a perfect adornment for Our living quarters. The form of this stag will be a source of amazement for Your noble brother Bharata, My mothers-in-law, and myself.

“If, O tiger among men, this stag cannot be caught alive, then its skin will be sufficient. When this beast has been slain, I wish to sit upon its skin, golden like a jambu fruit, spread over a mat of soft kuśa grass. This wish of Mine is rather harsh for a woman, but the beauty of this creature has Me enchanted.”

Rāma was also fascinated by the stag’s golden fur, sapphire antlers, sunny hue and splendor like the star-lit sky. After hearing Sītā’s request and seeing that wonderful stag—being attracted by the beauty of the creature and impelled by Sītā—Rāma said to His brother Lakṣmaṇa: “Just see the desire Sītā has for this stag. Because of his outstanding beauty, this stag will not live long. There is no such stag in Indra’s Nandana Garden, nor in Kuvera’s Citraratha Garden, how then could there be such a stag on this earth? The rows of hair on the stag’s body are very pleasing and the spots on his body are shining like flakes of gold. See his tongue shining like a flame of fire coming out of his mouth when he yawns, like a streak of lightning bursting out of a cloud. With his mouth resembling a cup made of sapphire and his belly resembling a conchshell or a pearl, whose mind would not be attracted by that stag? Whose mind would not be astonished by his golden effulgence and splendor like variegated gems? O Lakṣmaṇa, even for the sake of their skins and for the sport of it, kings with bows hunt deer in the great forest. By such an enterprise one can amass great wealth, for in the wilderness are to be found gold, many kinds of gems and valuable minerals. All of these increase one’s accumulated wealth, O Lakṣmaṇa, just as Indra acquires whatever he thinks of. Those who seek wealth and are knowledgeable with how to achieve it call wealth that which one pursues without premeditation through efforts intended to achieve wealth. The slender-waisted Sītā will sit with Me upon the golden pelt of this best of stags.

“I think that neither a kādālī deer, nor a priyakī, nor a praveṇī, nor a sheep can be compared with this in softness. This splendid stag and the one which shines in heaven as a star—both are divine. If, O Lakṣmaṇa, this stag is what you say he is, then it is a trick of the rākṣasas and will have to be slain by Me. Surely self-realized sages have been slaughtered by this merciless rākṣasa Mārīca as he roamed through the forest. Many kings bearing excellent bows have been slain by this stag when he appeared before

them. Therefore he should be killed. In the past the rākṣasa Vātāpi used to torment the ascetics in this forest. By entering their stomachs and then exiting violently, he used to kill the brāhmaṇas, as a she-mule is killed by her own fetus. Once upon a time, out of excessive lust, Vātāpi met the great sage Agastya. By his spiritual power, the sage ate that rākṣasa, so it is said. Seeing the rākṣasa eager to assume his original form, the sage smiled and said the following: ‘O Vātāpi, without any consideration you have killed many outstanding brāhmaṇas in this world by means of your power. Therefore I shall digest you.’

“Similarly, that rākṣasa over there who mocks Me, though I am always upholding righteousness and controlling My senses, will be destroyed as was Vātāpi. Having met Me, he will be killed as Vātāpi was by Agastya. O Lakṣmaṇa, stay here dressed in armor and look after Sītā. Whatever duties We have are subservient to the protection of Sītā. I shall either capture this stag or kill it. In the meantime, I am immediately leaving to bring back the stag. Just see how desirous Sītā is for this stag. In fact, this stag will not survive today because of its fine fur. You should stand guard in the cottage with Sītā until I kill that spotted deer with an arrow. After killing it and taking its skin, I shall quickly return, O Lakṣmaṇa. Keeping Sītā with You, remain vigilant at every moment, with apprehension from all sides, in the company of the wise vulture Jaṭāyu, who is very capable and powerful.”

RĀMA KILLS MĀRĪCA

After warning His brother in this way, the glorious Rāma fastened His golden sword. Grabbing His triple-curved bow as if it were an ornament for Himself and fastening two quivers, He set forth. Seeing Lord Rāma approaching, Mārīca fled away. He would disappear out of fear and then reappear. Holding His bow and carrying his sword tied to His waist, Rāma ran to where the stag was. He saw before Him light being emanated by the form of the stag. Looking back again and again at Lord Rāma holding a bow, he ran into the great forest. Sometimes the stag leapt past Rāma, and sometimes he tempted Rāma to touch him with the hand. Sometimes, being frightened and confused, he jumped into the air. Sometimes he was visible and sometimes he was invisible in the depths of the forest, like the orb of the moon hidden by scattered clouds. One moment he would come into view, then suddenly appear at a distance. By this appearing and disappearing, Mārīca in the form of a stag drew Rāma far away from the cottage. Tricked by the stag and feeling helpless, Śrī Rāma, becoming angry and perplexed, took shelter in the shade of a tree, sitting on the tender grass.

That rākṣasa in the form of a stag bewildered Rāma. The stag again appeared in the distance surrounded by forest deer. Seeing Rāma desirous of capturing him, he fled again. He disappeared that very moment out of fear. Then again he came out of a grove of trees in the distance. When the mighty Rāma saw the stag, He made up His mind to kill him. Rāma angrily pulled out a blazing arrow that shone like the sun for killing the enemy. He placed it on the bow string and pulled it back forcefully. Aiming at the stag, Rāma shot the arrow, which hissed like a snake and which was made by Lord Brahmā. The excellent arrow pierced the body of the stag and penetrated into Mārīca's heart like a bolt of lightning. The stag jumped as high as a palm tree due to the pain inflicted by the arrow. Falling down on the ground, with little life left, he began roaring and bellowing frightfully. As he was dying, Mārīca abandoned that artificial body. Mārīca remembered Rāvaṇa's instructions that Sītā should send Lakṣmaṇa to where he and Rāma were so

that Rāvaṇa could abduct Her in solitude. Seeing that the time had arrived to do that, Mārīca let out a cry that was exactly like Rāma's voice, saying: "O Sītā! O Lakṣmaṇa!" Having his vital organs pierced by Rāma's unparalleled arrow, Mārīca gave up the form of a stag and resumed his own form as a huge-bodied rākṣasa and then expired.

In this way, the rākṣasa was slain by Rāma's arrow, revealing his form with long fangs and decorated with gold armlets, necklaces and other ornaments. Seeing the terrible-looking rākṣasa fallen on the ground, writhing in the dirt, Rāma's mind turned to Sītā and He remembered Lakṣmaṇa's warning: "This was in fact a trick played by Mārīca as Lakṣmaṇa had said. It has turned out exactly as He said, in that I have just slain Mārīca. Since the rākṣasa yelled out 'O Sītā! O Lakṣmaṇa!' as he died, what must Sītā have thought on hearing that? And to what condition will the strong-armed Lakṣmaṇa be reduced?"

Thinking in this way, the virtuous Rāma's hair stood on end out of concern. Rāma was overwhelmed with a gripping fear born of despondency after hearing the imitative call made by the rākṣasa as he died. After killing that spotted deer and taking its skin, Rāma hurriedly returned toward Janasthāna.

LAKṢMAṆA LEAVES SĪTĀ TO HELP RĀMA

Recognizing that aggrieved yell in the jungle to be like Her husband's voice, Sītā said to Lakṣmaṇa: "Go and find out what has happened to Rāma. Neither My heart nor My life air is functioning properly. I have heard the voice of someone crying out loudly in distress. You should protect Your wailing brother in the wilderness. Run quickly to Your brother, who, like a bull surrounded by lions, is seeking your help." Even after hearing Sītā's plea, Lakṣmaṇa did not go because He remembered His brother's instruction not to leave Sītā. Sītā therefore became upset and said: "O Lakṣmaṇa, You are like an enemy of Your brother in the guise of a friend because You do not rush to the aid of Your brother in this difficulty. You want Rāma to perish so that You can have Me. Out of the desire to have Me, You do not go to the aid of Rāma. I think You are glad about Your brother's plight. You do not have any affection for Him. That is why You stand here unperturbed without budging. Indeed, what is the use of My staying here when the person with whom You came here in the forest as Your master has fallen into danger."

Lakṣmaṇa replied to Sītā, who was crying tears of grief and was frightened like a deer: "O Sītā, without a doubt Your husband cannot be defeated by any nāga, asura, gandharva, demigod, human being or rākṣasa. O lady, there is no one among the gods, men, gandharvas, birds, rākṣasas, goblins, kinnaras, beasts or fearsome dānavas who can stand up in battle to Rāma, who is equal to Indra. Rāma cannot be killed in battle. You should not talk like that. I dare not leave You alone in the forest without Rāma. His strength cannot be counteracted in combat by the forces of the strong, not even by the three worlds combined together, including Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. Let Your heart be at ease. Give up this anxiety. After killing that fine stag, Your husband will soon return. Obviously that was not Rāma's voice but a trick executed by someone. It was certainly a trick of that rākṣasa Mārīca, like the mirage of a city floating in the sky. O Sītā, You have been

entrusted into My care by the great soul Rāma. I dare not leave You. We have become the enemies of these night-stalkers by the slaughter of Khara and the destruction of Janasthāna. In the wilderness, the rākṣasas whose pleasure it is to destroy make many different imitative sounds. Therefore, do not feel anxious.”

When She had been spoken to in this way by Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā became so angry that Her eyes turned red and She harshly replied to the truthful Lakṣmaṇa: “O ignoble one, being heartless and a perpetrator of merciless acts, You are a disgrace to Your family! I think You are glad to see Rāma in difficulty. That is why You speak like this upon seeing Rāma’s difficulty. It is not at all surprising that such sin could abide in heartless enemies like You, who go about in disguise. You have followed Rāma into the forest as His only male companion, concealing that You had actually come after Me, or that You were sent by Bharata. O Lakṣmaṇa, that goal cannot be attained, whether Yours or Bharata’s. How could I desire some other lesser man after having taken shelter of My husband whose complexion is like a blue lotus flower and whose eyes are as broad as a lotus petal? I shall undoubtedly give up My life in front of You, O Lakṣmaṇa. Without Rāma I cannot live in this world for even one moment.”

Being spoken to with such harsh and hair-raising words by Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa with joined palms replied as follows: “I dare not answer You who are a worshipable deity for Me. It is not at all surprising for women to utter words inappropriate for them, O princess of Mithilā, since it has been seen in this world that their nature is like that. Women readily abandon social constraints and are fickle, hard-hearted and creators of discord. Indeed, I cannot bear such words which have entered My ears like red-hot steel arrows, O daughter of King Janaka. Let all the inhabitants of the forest listen to Me as witnesses. Fie on You who have spoken harshly and unjustly to Me, a speaker of truth. You distrust Me, who abide by My elder brother’s instructions, because of Your feminine nature and wicked disposition, and therefore You will perish. I shall go to where Rāma is. May all be well with You, O lovely woman! May all the forest spirits protect You, O lady with broad eyes! The fearful omens appearing before Me make Me wonder if I shall see You when I return with Rāma.”

When Sītā had been spoken to in this way by Lakṣmaṇa, She thereafter tearfully uttered the following sharp words: “O Lakṣmaṇa, without Rāma, I shall jump into the Godāvārī River, or hang Myself or throw Myself off a cliff. I shall drink strong poison or enter a blazing fire. However, I shall never touch any other man than Rāma.” Having taken this vow before Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā, being overwhelmed with grief, beat Her stomach with Her hands and cried. Disturbed to see the broad-eyed lady pained and crying, Lakṣmaṇa consoled Her. Sītā, however said nothing in reply to Her brother-in-law. Thereafter Lakṣmaṇa bid Sītā farewell by bowing slightly with joined palms. Staring at Sītā for a long while, the self-controlled Lakṣmaṇa departed for where Rāma was.

RĀVAṆA APPROACHES SĪTĀ TO ABDUCT HER

Lakṣmaṇa was angry at having been spoken to so harshly by Sītā and longed to be with Rāma, so He departed without delay. Then, when he had the chance, the ten-headed Rāvaṇa quickly advanced toward Sītā, disguising himself as a wandering mendicant. Rāvaṇa was wearing soft, saffron-colored cloth. He wore a śikhā, or tuft of hair on the crown of his head. He was carrying a parasol and was wearing wooden sandals. On his left shoulder rested a shiny stick and a kamaṇḍalu. The mighty Rāvaṇa approached Sītā in the garb of an ascetic while She was alone without the protection of the two brothers, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, just as great darkness prevails at dusk, which is without the sun and moon. He looked on that youthful wife of Rāma as the inauspicious planet Rāhu looks upon the star Rohiṇī when it is without the moon. Seeing the sinful and terrible Rāvaṇa, the trees which grew in Janasthāna did not rustle their leaves nor did the wind blow. Seeing the red-eyed demon staring at it, the swift-flowing Godāvārī River began to flow slowly out of fear. The ten-headed demon Rāvaṇa in the guise of a mendicant was waiting for an opportunity to approach Sītā while Rāma was absent. The wicked rākṣasa wearing the dress of a pious person drew near to Sītā who was lamenting for Her husband, as the planet Saturn approaches the constellation citrā. That sinful demon disguised as a holy person was like a well covered with grass.

He suddenly stood before Sītā, Rāma's glorious wife, and stared at Her intently. Her teeth and lips were beautiful. She was as effulgent as the full moon. Seated in the thatched cottage, She was stricken with the pangs of grief and shed tears profusely. Her eyes were like the petals of a lotus flower. She was dressed in yellow silk garments. The night-stalker of evil thoughts drew near to Sītā. Rāvaṇa was pierced by the arrows of Cupid. He began reciting spiritual hymns from the Vedas and then addressed Her politely in solitude. It is said that Rāvaṇa praised Her as the best of women

in this world, and that by Her body She was as effulgent as Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune, without a lotus in Her hand.

He said: “Who are You, O woman the color of gold dressed in yellow silk? You are as beautiful as a dazzling garland of lotus flowers or a mass of lotus flowers blooming in a pool of water. With Your beautiful face You appear to be the goddess of modesty, the goddess of fame, the goddess of beauty, the auspicious goddess of fortune, a celestial damsel, the goddess of mystic powers, or the goddess of love acting according to her own whims. Your teeth are even, smooth and white like jasmine buds. Your eyes are broad and clear, tinged with red at the ends and have dark pupils. Your hips are wide and Your thighs are plump like the trunk of an elephant. These two breasts are fully developed, round, pressing against each other, prominent with round, projecting teats. They are adorable and attractive. They resemble a pair of palmyra fruits and are adorned with strands of lovely gems.

“O playful woman, Your smile is beautiful, Your teeth are beautiful, Your eyes are beautiful. You captivate my mind, as a river erodes its bank by its waters. Your waist can be encircled by my index finger and thumb. Your hair is very fine and Your breasts are bulging. I have never before seen on the face of this earth a goddess, gandharvī, yakṣiṇī, kinnarī, or human woman with such beauty. Your loveliness, which is exceptional in all the worlds, as well as Your youthfulness, age and residence in this forest are bewildering my mind. Therefore leave this place. May all be well with You. You should not stay here. This forest is inhabited by fierce rākṣasas who can change their appearance at will. You deserve to reside in the pleasant upper stories of palaces in prosperous cities and stroll in sweet-smelling gardens. I consider as best that flower garland, food, glistening clothing or husband that are united with You, O woman with dark eyes. Who are You? You appear to me to be a goddess of the rudras, maruts or vasus. Neither gandharvas, nor gods, nor kinnaras visit this place. This is the abode of rākṣasas. How did You come here? In this place live monkeys, lions, elephants, tigers, deer, bears, hyenas and hawks. How is it that You do not fear them? Why are You not afraid of being alone in this great jungle inhabited by fierce, mad elephants that move about very quickly? Who are You? Whose wife are You? Where do

You come from? Why do You wander about alone in the Daṇḍakāraṇya Forest which is frequented by terrible rākṣasas?”

Being praised in this way by the evil Rāvaṇa, Sītā only noticed that a twice-born brāhmaṇa had arrived and offered him all the respect due a guest. After first offering him a grass mat to sit on and water with which to wash his feet, She then said to Rāvaṇa who had assumed a gentle appearance: “There is cooked food ready.” Seeing him suddenly arrived in the guise of a brāhmaṇa, carrying the kamaṇḍalu water pot and wearing saffron-colored clothes, She therefore considered him worthy of respect and said to him: “O brāhmaṇa, here is a grass mat. Sit on it if you wish. Here is water for washing your feet. Please accept it. And here is excellent produce from the forest that has been prepared for you. You may eat them now peacefully.”

Being invited to eat, Rāvaṇa closely observed Queen Sītā who had spoken the full, required formula for invitation. Thereafter He fully decided to kidnap Sītā by force and thus bring about his own death. At that moment, Sītā cast Her glance around for Her well-dressed husband who had gone hunting with Lakṣmaṇa, but instead of seeing Them, all She saw was the great, green wilderness.

SĪTĀ TELLS RĀVAṆA ABOUT HERSELF

When Sītā had been questioned in that way by Rāvaṇa, who desired to abduct Her, She began telling about Herself. Thinking for a while that Rāvaṇa, being a brāhmaṇa and a guest, might curse Her if She did not reply, She spoke the following words: “I am the daughter of the great soul Janaka, king of Mithilā. I am known by the name Sītā and am the wife of Lord Rāma. Bless you, O best of the twice-born. I lived for twelve years in the palace of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty where I enjoyed all kinds of humanly pleasures in abundance. During the thirteenth year the king along with his ministers decided to install Rāma as prince regent. As Rāma’s coronation was being arranged, My mother-in-law named Kaikeyī asked the king for a boon. Taking advantage of his virtuousness, Kaikeyī extracted two boons from My father-in-law who was always true to his promise—the banishment of My husband and the installation of Bharata as prince regent. She told him: ‘I shall neither eat nor sleep nor drink ever again. If Rāma is coronated I shall die.’

“When Kaikeyī was speaking in this way, My father-in-law tried to dissuade her by offering her all kinds of wealth and material amenities. She, however, did not accept these. My most glorious husband was twenty-five years old and My age calculated from My birth was eighteen. Known in the world as Rāma, My husband is virtuous, truthful and pure. He has broad eyes like the petals of a lotus flower. His arms are very strong and He is dedicated to the welfare of all living entities. The glorious king, being smitten with love for Kaikeyī, in order to fulfill her cherished object, did not install Rāma as prince regent. When My husband Rāma arrived before His father for being coronated, Kaikeyī spoke the following somber words: ‘O Rāma, hear from me the command given by Your father. The kingdom must be given to Bharata without any hindrance and You must live in exile in the forest for fourteen years. Go to the forest, O descendant of Kakutstha, and release Your father from the sin of speaking falsehood.’ Upon hearing her request, My husband, who was fearless in all respects and who was always

steadfast in the execution of vows, replied: ‘So be it,’ and did as requested. He always gives and never accepts. He always speaks the truth and never lies. Such is the vow, O brāhmaṇa, which Rāma is firmly upholding. His heroic half-brother is named Lakṣmaṇa. That tiger among men is the slayer of enemies in battle and is the companion of Rāma. Rāma’s brother Lakṣmaṇa is observant of duty and steadfast in vows. With bow in hand, He has followed Rāma into exile as He left with Me. Wearing matted hair, dressed as an ascetic and accompanied by His younger brother, Rāma, who is ever-promoting righteousness and who has mastered His senses, has entered the Daṇḍakā Forest with Me.

“Since the three of Us were expelled from the kingdom by Kaikeyī, O best of the brāhmaṇas, We have been wandering the deep forest depending on Our own strength. Rest for a while if you are able to stay here. My husband will shortly return with all kinds of edible products from the forest. Now please tell Me truthfully about your name, family and lineage. Also tell Me why you wander about the Daṇḍakā Forest alone.”

As Sītā finished speaking, the mighty Rāvaṇa, the ruler of the rākṣasas, spoke the following sharp words: “O Sītā, I am called Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasa hordes, whom all the worlds fear, including the gods, demons and nāgas. After seeing You dressed in silken garments and possessing a complexion like molten gold, I no longer find delight in my own wives, O faultless woman. Become the foremost of queens among all the many women whom I abducted from here and there. My capital named Laṅkā is in the midst of the sea. Surrounded by the ocean, it is situated on a mountain top. There You will enjoy with me in the forest groves and never care to return to this forest, O beautiful woman. Five thousand maid-servants completely decked in jewelry will serve You if you become my wife, O Sītā.”

When Sītā, whose bodily limbs were perfect, heard this, She became furious and replied to the rākṣasa with disdain: “I have taken a vow to follow My husband Rāma, who is unshakable like a great mountain, who is equal to Lord Indra and who is imperturbable like the ocean. I have taken a vow to follow Rāma, a lion among men, whose arms are very strong. His

chest is broad. His stride is like a valorous lion's and He resembles a lion in qualities. I have taken a vow to follow Rāma, whose face is like a full moon. He is the favorite son of King Daśaratha. He has conquered His senses. That great soul's fame has spread far and wide. Even so, you, a jackal, desire Me, a lioness difficult to achieve. You cannot touch Me anymore than you can touch the glare of the sun. Surely you must be seeing many evil omens, such as gold trees, which foretell your demise.

Indeed, O Rāvaṇa, you desire the dear wife of Lord Rāma, the descendant of the Raghu Dynasty. You wish to extract a tooth from the mouth of a strong and hungry lion—the enemy of deer—or from the mouth of a poisonous snake. You wish to carry away in your hand that best of mountains called Mandara. You want to go away safely after drinking the deadly poison called kālakuṭa. You are rubbing a needle on your eyes. You are licking your tongue on the edge of a sharp razor blade. You wish to violate the dear wife of Lord Rāma. Having tied a boulder around your neck, you wish to cross the ocean. With your two hands you wish to carry away the sun and moon. You wish to abduct the dear wife of Lord Rāma. After seeing a blazing fire, you wish to carry it away in a piece of cloth. You wish to carry away Rāma's wife of good conduct. You wish to walk on the points of iron-tipped tridents. You wish to violate the wife of Lord Rāma.

“Rāma and you are as different as a wild lion and a jackal, the ocean and a small stream, immortal nectar and stale liquor. Rāma and you are as different as gold and lead, sandalwood paste and mud, an elephant and a stray cat. Rāma and you are as different as Garuḍa and a crow, a peacock and a pelican, a swan and a vulture.

As long as Rāma, who is equal in power to the thousand-eyed Lord Indra, is present with bow and arrows in His hands, though you abduct Me, you will not be able to enjoy Me, as a honeybee dies from ingesting clarified butter.”

After Sītā, who was meek and mild, had spoken these courageous words to that night-stalker, Her bodily limbs began shaking, like a banana tree hit by strong winds. When Rāvaṇa, who was as formidable as death,

noticed that Sītā was trembling, he began boasting about his name, strength, family and activities in order to frighten Her.

RĀVAṆA BOASTS ABOUT HIMSELF TO SĪTĀ

Rāvaṇa wrinkled his brow as Sītā was belittling him and then replied using the following harsh words: “May all be well with You, my lady. I am the mighty ten-headed son of Viśravā and half-brother of Kuvera known by the name Rāvaṇa, from whom the gods, gandharvas, devils, birds and serpents all flee in fear, as creatures always flee impending death. When I was provoked for some reason I fought furiously with my half-brother Kuvera and defeated him by my prowess. In fear of me, Kuvera gave up his own prosperous abode of Laṅkā and went to stay on that best of mountains known as Kailāsa. I confiscated his spectacular aerial vehicle which can go wherever the driver wills known by the name Puṣpaka which I ride through the skies, O gentle lady. Upon seeing my face when I am enraged, the demigods headed by Indra become terrified and flee. Wherever I stand the wind blows softly, and out of fear, the sun with its strong rays becomes as mild as the moon. Wherever I stand or walk the leaves of the trees do not rustle and the waters of the rivers are still.

“Beyond the ocean is my beautiful capital city named Laṅkā. It is full of fierce rākṣasas and vies with Indra’s city of Amarāvātī. It is surrounded by a gleaming white wall. The city is very pleasing with its rooms plated with gold and its gateways adorned with precious gems. The city is crowded with elephants, horses and chariots and resounds with the beating of drums. It has all kinds of trees that bear fruit at all times and is beautified by numerous gardens. Dwell there with me, O Princess Sītā. You will no longer remember human women. Enjoying human and celestial delights, O lady of fine complexion, You will forget the human Rāma whose life is now expired. Although Rāma was the eldest son, due to His meager prowess and spoiled intelligence, King Daśaratha installed his favorite son Bharata instead and exiled Rāma to the forest. Of what good to You is that fallen

monarch Rāma who is now living as an ascetic practicing austerities, O broad-eyed lady?

“Since I, the lord of all the rākṣasas, have personally come here out of love for You and am pierced by Cupid’s arrows, You should not reject me. If You reject me, You will surely reap a dreadful consequence, as did Uvrasi when she kicked King Purūravā. The human Rāma is not even equal to my finger in battle. It is Your good fortune that I have come. Now choose me, O woman of lovely complexion!”

After Rāvaṇa had spoken to Sītā in this way, She became furious and Her eyes became reddened. She then spoke the following harsh words to that leader of the rākṣasas in that lonely place: “How is it that you wish to perpetrate some evil deed after indicating that you are the half-brother of Kuvera, who is respected by all living beings? Certainly all the rākṣasas will perish, O Rāvaṇa, because of having you as their king, brutal, witless and uncontrolled as you are. One might be able to survive after kidnapping Śacī, the wife of Lord Indra; but it is not possible to survive after kidnapping Me, the wife of Lord Rāma. You might be able to live for a long time after violating the Lord Indra’s wife, whose beauty is unexcelled, but if you mistreat one like Me, even though you may have drunk the elixir of immortality, you will not be released from the death punishment, O rākṣasa.”

RĀVAṆA KIDNAPS SĪTĀ

When the mighty Rāvaṇa heard what Sītā said, he struck one hand against the other and then assumed his actual gigantic form. He once again began speaking at length to Sītā: “I think that You have not heard of my heroism and prowess because of Your madness. Standing in the sky, I can lift up the earth with my two hands. I can drink the ocean. I can kill death in combat. With my sharp arrows I can check the movement of the sun or cleave open the surface of the earth. Look at me, able to assume any form I choose! I am the granter of boons and lord, O angry woman!”

When Rāvaṇa finished saying this, he began glowing like a fire or like the sun. He was so angry that his eyes with their dark ends turned reddish. All of a sudden, Rāvaṇa abandoned the pleasing form of a mendicant and resumed his own actual form resembling death personified. His eyes were blood-shot. He was resplendent and wore golden earrings. Being highly enraged, he resembled a dark blue storm cloud. The night-stalker assumed a form with ten heads and was armed with bow and arrows. He gave up the guise of a wandering ascetic and exhibited his original huge form as Rāvaṇa, the leader of the rākṣasas. His eyes were blood-red from anger and his complexion was like a mass of clouds. He stood there, dressed in red robes, staring at that jewel of women Sītā. The ends of Her hair were dark and She was as effulgent as the sun, dressed in shimmering cloth and sparkling ornaments.

To Her Rāvaṇa said: “O lovely lady, if You desire a husband well-known throughout the three worlds, take shelter of me. I am a husband worthy of You. Serve me for a long time. I am a lover worthy of Your praise. O gentle woman, I shall never do anything to displease You. Abandon Your affection for that human Rāma and direct Your affection to me. O foolish woman who thinks Herself wise, what virtues do You see in Rāma that You continue to be attached to Him, even though He has lost His kingdom, has not achieved any of His goals and is on the verge of death? On the insistence

of a woman that fool gave up His kingdom, family and friends to reside in this forest frequented by beasts of prey.”

After speaking in that way to Sītā, who spoke sweetly and deserved to be treated kindly, that most wicked rākṣasa, being deluded by lust, approached Her. Rāvaṇa grabbed Sītā as the planet Mars seized the constellation Rohiṇī. With his left hand he grabbed the lotus-eyed Sītā by Her hair. With his right hand he grabbed hold of Her thigh. Upon seeing him looking like a mountain, having sharp fangs, long arms and resembling death personified, the forest spirits were stricken with fear and fled. The magical and resplendent chariot of Rāvaṇa suddenly appeared there. The big chariot was plated with gold, drawn by mules and rumbled loudly. Thereafter, frightening Sītā with harsh language and bellowing loudly, Rāvaṇa embraced Her with his arms and then got on the chariot. When Rāvaṇa had caught hold of Sītā, being stricken with grief, She cried out for Rāma who was far away in the forest. Carrying Sītā who had no desire to be with him and was therefore writhing like a snake, the lusty Rāvaṇa, having mounted the chariot, took off into the air. As Sītā was being carried away through the sky by Rāvaṇa, She began calling out loudly like an insane or injured woman, due to Her mental discomfiture: “O strong-armed Lakṣmaṇa! O delighter of your brother’s mind! You are unaware that I am being carried away by an impetuous rākṣasa. O Rāma, although You have given up Your royal life, happiness and wealth for the sake of righteousness, You do not see Me being wrongfully abducted. You are no doubt the tamer of the unruly, O subduer of enemies. Why, then, do You not punish Rāvaṇa who is so sinful?

“O Rāvaṇa, naturally the result of an impudent person is not seen immediately. Time has a role to play in this regards, as it does in the ripening of crops. You have perpetrated this crime because your intelligence has been robbed by fate. May you suffer a grievous calamity on account of Rāma, who will put an end to your life. Alas, Kaikeyī and her relations now have their desire fulfilled in that I, the lawful wife of a glorious warrior desirous of righteousness, am being kidnapped.

“I beseech the karṇikāra trees blossoming in Janasthāna: please inform Rāma at once that Rāvaṇa is abducting Sītā. I offer My respect to Mount Prasravaṇa whose peak abounds in flowers: please inform Rāma at once that Rāvaṇa is abducting Sītā. I offer My respects to the Godāvarī River which is always crowded with swans and ducks: please inform Rāma at once that Rāvaṇa is abducting Sītā. I offer My respectful obeisances to all those deities who reside in this forest in many different trees: please inform My husband that I have been kidnapped.

“I take shelter of all the herds of beasts and flocks of birds that dwell in the forest: please inform Rāma that I, His dear wife more important to Him than His own life, have been helplessly abducted by Rāvaṇa. When the strong-armed Rāma learns about My abduction, He will retrieve Me by His prowess, even if I have been taken to the heavenly planets by the sun god.”

Lamenting piteously, the grief-stricken Sītā saw the vulture Jaṭāyu in the forest. When that shapely lady in the clutches of Rāvaṇa saw the vulture, being gripped by fear, She cried out with a voice choked with anguish: “O noble Jaṭāyu, just see how I am being ruthlessly carried away like a woman without a protector by this sinful ruler of the rākṣasas! You are incapable of stopping this cruel night-stalker, for he is mighty, prone to victory, armed with weapons and wicked in disposition. O Jaṭāyu, you should tell Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa the truth about My abduction, as well as everything relating to it in detail.”

JATĀYU CHALLENGES RĀVAṆA

The vulture Jaṭāyu was asleep when he heard Sītā's call for help. Waking up, he suddenly saw Rāvaṇa and Sītā. Sitting on a tree branch, the glorious Jaṭāyu, who resembled a mountain and who had a sharp beak, uttered the following good words: "O ten-headed Rāvaṇa, I am the mighty king of the vultures known by the name Jaṭāyu. I live by the ancient code of ethics and am true to my promise. Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha, is the king of all the worlds and is equal to Indra. He is engaged in procuring the welfare of all living beings. This fine lady whom you wish to abduct is the illustrious legally-wed wife of Rāma and is known by the name Sītā. How could a king observant of the codes of martial conduct touch someone else's wife? O mighty rākṣasa, the wives of kings especially deserve protection. Arrest this degraded idea of touching another man's wife.

"A sober person should not do that for which another might ridicule him. A wise man should protect others' wives as much as he does his own. The cultured pursue wealth, sense gratification and even customs not sanctioned in the scriptures when these are practiced by kings, O descendant of Paulastya. A king embodies duty, sense enjoyment and the topmost treasurehouse of assets. The king is the root of dutifulness, good conduct and sinful behavior. O best of the rākṣasas, since you are sinful by nature and fickle too, how have you achieved the position of a ruler, like a low-class rogue riding in a celestial vehicle? One who is by nature lusty cannot get rid of that nature, for nobility does not reside for long in the house of the wicked. Since the righteous Rāma has committed no crime in your city or kingdom, why do you commit a crime against Him? If Khara, while residing in Janasthāna, exceeded his limits on account of Śūrpaṇakhā and was therefore slain by Rāma, tell me truthfully how that was Rāma's fault for which you are now kidnapping His wife?

“Immediately set Sītā free. Do not allow yourself to be burned by Rāma’s fierce eye, which is like fire, as Vṛtra was by the thunderbolt of Indra. You are unaware that you have a venomous serpent tied to the end of your cloth and you do not see that your neck is encircled by the noose of death. One should only bear that burden which does not crush one, O dear friend. One should only eat that food which on being digested does not cause illness. Who will perform an act which is not conducive to righteousness? Sixty thousand years have elapsed since I was born, O Rāvaṇa, during which I have enjoyed hereditary reign over birds. I am old and you are young, armed with bow and arrows, and wearing armor. Even so, you will not be able to leave with Sītā so easily.

“You will not be able to forcibly abduct Sītā while I am watching, anymore than one can change the fixed meaning of the revealed scriptures by logical arguments. If you are brave, then fight! Stop for a while, O Rāvaṇa! You will soon be lying dead on the ground as Khara did previously. Rāma, clad in cloth made from tree bark, who killed daityas and dānavas in combat many times, will slay you before long on the battlefield.

“What can I do now that the two princes have gone far away? O despicable beast, you will quickly vanish in fear of Them, of this there is no doubt. As long as I am alive, you cannot take away Sītā, Rāma’s beautiful, dear wife, whose eyes are shaped like the petals of a lotus flower. Anyway, I have to do what is pleasing to the great soul Rāma and to King Daśaratha, even at the risk of my life. Wait! Wait a minute! O Rāvaṇa, look! I shall offer you hospitality in the form of a fight as best I can, O night-stalker. Let me knock you down from your fine chariot as one would knock a ripe fruit out of a palmyra tree.”

RĀVAṆA KILLS JAṬĀYU

After Jaṭāyu logically instructed Rāvaṇa in this way, the furious Rāvaṇa's eyes burned like twenty fires. With eyes red from anger, the lord of the rākṣasas rushed impetuously toward the lord of birds. The exchange of blows between those two as they fought in the wilderness was as tumultuous as two wind-driven clouds colliding in the sky. The battle between the vulture and the rākṣasa was amazing, like the conflict between two famous mountains, both of which were named Mālyavān. Thereafter the monstrous rākṣasa showered the vulture king with solid steel arrows, sharp steel-tipped arrows and barbed arrows. During that encounter, Jaṭāyu endured Rāvaṇa's weapons which formed a network of arrows. With the sharp talons on his feet, Jaṭāyu inflicted many wounds on Rāvaṇa's body. Then, for the purpose of slaying his enemy, the ten-headed rākṣasa angrily grabbed ten straight-shooting and fearsome arrows that were like Death's rod of chastisement. The formidable, sharp and barbed arrows released by the powerful rākṣasa flew straight and pierced the vulture. Seeing Sītā on the rākṣasa's chariot with tears in Her eyes, Jaṭāyu paid no attention to those arrows and rushed toward the rākṣasa.

Then the heroic lord of birds broke with his two feet Rāvaṇa's bow which was adorned with pearls and fixed with an arrow. Lifting up another bow, the enraged Rāvaṇa then released a volley of hundreds and thousands of arrows. Surrounded on all sides by arrows on the arena of battle, Jaṭāyu resembled a bird sitting in its nest. Deflecting those arrows with his wings, Jaṭāyu broke Rāvaṇa's large bow with his feet. By the flapping of his wings, the powerful lord of birds knocked off Rāvaṇa's armor which shone like fire. He also killed the chariot's swift team of refulgent mules that had heads like goblins and wore gold breast-plates. He then smashed the large chariot that shone like a flame of fire and was encrusted with gold and gems. With great force Jaṭāyu knocked down the parasol that was like a full moon, along with

the yak-tail whisks and the rākṣasas who held them. The glorious king of birds then forcibly snapped off with his beak the head of Rāvaṇa’s chariot driver.

With his bow broken, deprived of his chariot and his horses and driver killed, Rāvaṇa clutched Sītā as he fell to the ground. When they saw Rāvaṇa fallen on the ground and his vehicle destroyed, all living beings honored Jaṭāyu saying: “Well done! Well done!” Seeing that the ruler of bird species was exhausted due to his old age, Rāvaṇa was elated and, clutching hold of Sītā, once more rose up into the air. As the delighted Rāvaṇa was going, holding Sītā in his embrace, the vulture king flew up toward him. Blocking his way, the glorious Jaṭāyu said the following: “O less intelligent Rāvaṇa, surely it is for the slaughter of the rākṣasas that you are carrying away the wife of Rāma, whose arrows feel like the striking of thunderbolts. With your friends and relatives, ministers, army and retinue, you are drinking a deadly poison, as a thirsty man drinks water. Not foreseeing the results of their activities, the ignorant quickly perish, as you will too. Since you are caught in the noose of death, like a fish that has swallowed a hook along with the bait, how will you get free?

“Indeed, those two descendants of the Raghu Dynasty—Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa—who are most difficult to assail, will not forgive the violation of this hermitage. The manner in which you, a coward, have executed this deed denounced by the world is the path trodden by thieves, not heroes. O Rāvaṇa, stop for a while! Fight if you have the courage! You will shortly lie down dead on the ground like your brother Khara. You have committed such an outrageous action for your own destruction, as a person may do at the time of death. Who would perform an action whose result is sinful, even though he be Brahmā, the lord of this world, or the Supreme Personality of Godhead?”

When Jaṭāyu finished speaking these auspicious words. The valorous vulture jumped on the back of the ten-headed rākṣasa. Grabbing the rākṣasa, Jaṭāyu cut him all over with his sharp talons, as a trainer mounted on an elephant would jab it with a goad. Having his talons, wings and beak as weapons, Jaṭāyu pecked Rāvaṇa’s back with his beak and pulled on his hair

with his talons. On being repeatedly tormented by the vulture king, Rāvaṇa trembled and his lips throbbed due to indignation.

Clutching Sītā tightly to his left thigh, Rāvaṇa, being infuriated, swung at Jaṭāyu with the palm of his hand. Dodging that blow, Jaṭāyu, the defeater of enemies, tore off Rāma's ten left arms with his beak. Even though his ten arms had been severed, new ones suddenly sprung out, like snakes that come out of an anthill while spewing poisonous flames. Then the ten-headed Rāvaṇa released Sītā and angrily struck the vulture king with his two fists and feet. The two heroes—the chief of the rākṣasas and the best of the winged creatures—engaged in combat for an hour. Drawing his sword, Rāvaṇa chopped off the wings, shoulders and feet of Jaṭāyu, who was fighting for the sake of Rāma. Having his wings cut off all of a sudden by the rākṣasa of frightful deeds, the vulture fell wounded on the ground with little life remaining. When Sītā saw Jaṭāyu fallen on the ground and drenched in blood, She ran toward him out of grief as if he were one of Her family relations. Rāvaṇa, the ruler of Laṅkā, looked at Jaṭāyu, who resembled a blue cloud, whose breast was whitish, whose prowess great and who now resembled an extinguished forest fire. Embracing the bird that was fallen on the ground due to the force of Rāvaṇa's blows, Sītā, who was effulgent as the moon, began weeping again.

RĀVAṆA ABDUCTS SĪTĀ

The ruler of the rākṣasas saw the vulture fallen on the ground near the cottage, almost dead and twitching. Seeing the vulture king mortally wounded by Rāvaṇa, the grief-stricken Sītā, whose face resembled the moon, began weeping. Embracing the vulture forcefully felled by Rāvaṇa, Sītā wailed due to intense anguish as follows: “Omens, dreams and the sounds and movements of birds and animals certainly foretell the happiness and distress of people. O Rāma, surely you do not know about this great calamity. Surely birds and beasts must be running toward You on account of Me. O Rāma, because of My ill fortune, here lies the bird Jātāyu who was struck down by the sinful rākṣasa when he came to My rescue. Save Me now, O Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa!” Thus the lovely woman, being sorely distressed, cried out loudly so that those nearby might hear. Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, ran toward Sītā, whose flower garland and ornaments were crushed and who was wailing like a woman without a husband. Rāvaṇa approached Sītā who was holding on to big trees like a climbing vine and repeatedly yelling: “Let Me go! Let Me go!” Deprived of Her husband in the wilderness, She cried out: “O Rāma! O Rāma!” Looking like death personified, Rāvaṇa caught hold of Sītā’s hair for putting an end to his own life.

When Sītā was assaulted in this way, the whole world of moving and nonmoving entities became disturbed and covered with darkness. At that time the wind did not blow and the sun became dim. When the grandsire of all living beings, Brahmā, saw by his spiritual intuition that the forlorn Sītā had been violently seized, he thought: “Our goal will now be achieved.” Seeing Sītā in the grips of Rāvaṇa, all the great sages who resided in Daṇḍakāranya were alarmed but also glad, foreseeing Rāvaṇa’s inevitable demise. Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, grabbed Sītā who was crying: “Rāma! Rāma! O Lakṣmaṇa!” and rose up into the sky. Sītā’s body was the same color as Her own ornaments of wrought gold. She was dressed in yellow silk garments. She was shining like a thunderbolt transfixed in the sky.

Because of Sītā's yellow cloth flapping in the wind, Rāvaṇa shone brightly like a mountain lit up by a wild fire. Copper-colored and fragrant lotus petals from the supremely auspicious Sītā scattered over Rāvaṇa's body. Fluttering in the wind, Sītā's silken cloth was the color of molten gold and glistened like a cloud rendered coppery by the sun at dusk.

Held in the lap of Rāvaṇa as He flew through the sky, Sītā, whose nose was fine and delicate, lost Her bodily effulgence, like a lotus flower detached from its stem. Her forehead was beautiful and Her hair, fine. Her complexion was like the interior of a lotus blossom. Her mouth was adorned with spotless, effulgent white teeth. Such was the spotless face of Sītā who was held in the lap of Rāvaṇa as he flew through the sky. Her face, which was as pleasing to behold as the moon, burst into tears, although She had previously wiped it dry. Her lovely lips were as red as rubies and Her face emitted a golden effulgence. Being captured by the rākṣasa, Her face did not look very bright without Rāma, like the moon shining during the daytime. Sītā being golden and the rākṣasa ruler being a dark blue, they resembled a gold band encircling a blue sapphire. Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, was like a golden lotus. She resembled a streak of lightning in a cloud as She glowed with Her sparkling ornaments in the arms of Rāvaṇa. She looked like newly grown yellowish twigs of trees. While on the dark blue body of Rāvaṇa, She was as effulgent as a gold chain on an elephant. Because of the tinkling of Her anklebells and other ornaments, the rākṣasa king seemed like a dark rumbling storm cloud.

As Sītā was being abducted, there was a shower of flowers all over the surface of the earth by the flowers falling from Her super-excellent body. On account of the speed at which he was abducting Her, the shower of flowers was again drawn back to Rāvaṇa. The shower of flowers came back and fell on Rāvaṇa, as the garland of spotless constellations rings Meru, the tallest of mountains. A strand of Sītā's sweet-sounding anklebells adorned with gems and which resembled a circle of lightning broke and fell. As the younger half-brother of Kuvera carried Sītā off into the sky, She shone by Her radiance like a huge meteor in the heavens. Her ornaments that were the color of fire jingled as they fell to the earth, like a worn out star falling

from the sky. Sītā's necklace of pearls which was brilliant like the moon fell from Her breast and looked like the Ganges descending from the heavens.

The tops of trees in which many different kinds of birds were roosting were strongly shaken by the blast of wind and seemed to be saying: "Don't be afraid!" With their lotus flowers devastated and their fish and aquatic creatures frightened, the lotus pools lamented as if for a deceased friend. Coming from all directions, lions, tigers, deer and birds angrily ran behind them at that time, following Sītā's shadow. As Sītā was being carried away, the mountains, shedding streams of tears from their faces in the form of waterfalls and raising their arms in the form of their peaks, seemed to be crying out. Upon seeing Sītā being abducted, the brilliant sun felt depressed; its effulgence vanished and its orb became pale. All the different species of living beings exclaimed: "There is no righteousness! Where is truth? There is no honesty or mercifulness since Rāvaṇa is kidnapping Rāma's wife Sītā." Terribly frightened and their faces sullen, the fawns wept. The forest deities' eyes were murky from shedding tears and their limbs shook terribly as they continually looked at Sītā. Being overwhelmed with intense grief, they wailed. Sītā was continuously crying out: "O Lakṣmaṇa! O Rāma!" as She looked down toward the ground. For his own destruction, the ten-headed demon was kidnapping that strong-minded lady whose hair was disheveled and whose auspicious cosmetic mark of tilaka on the forehead had been smeared off. In this way, being bereft of Her relatives and not seeing Rāma or Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā, who had beautiful teeth and a bright smile, became pale in the face out of fear.

SĪTĀ CHASTISES RĀVAṆA

Sītā, whose eyes had become as red as copper from anger and crying, was very disturbed to see Rāvaṇa, whose eyes were glaring fiercely, flying up into the sky. As She was being carried away, She wept piteously and said: “O lowly Rāvaṇa, are you not ashamed of what you are doing? Seeing Me all alone, you kidnapped Me and are now fleeing. O wicked rogue, certainly it was you who, desiring to kidnap Me and being the coward that you are, lured away My husband by a rākṣasa deceitfully disguised as a deer. Even the aged vulture king Jaṭāyu, who was a friend of My father-in-law and who attempted to rescue Me, has been killed by you. Your heroism is indeed great, O lowest of rākṣasas, in that after making your name known, you took possession of Me without confronting My husband. Why are you not ashamed of perpetrating such a disgraceful act as kidnapping a solitary woman, moreover, a woman who belongs to another? People throughout all the worlds will call your action contemptible, merciless and unrighteous, O proud fellow.

“Cursed be your pride and strength of which you spoke earlier. Cursed be your character which is a disgrace to your family in this world. What can be done when you are fleeing at such speed? Wait for just a short while and you will not return alive. Once you are within the range of the vision of those two princes, even if you are accompanied by an army, you will not be able to live more than an hour. You will not be able to bear the impact of Their arrows anymore than a bird can withstand contact with a fire blazing in a forest. For your own good you had better let Me go, O Rāvaṇa. Infuriated because of My abduction, My husband along with His younger brother will endeavor to kill you if you do not set Me free. The purpose for which you want to forcibly abduct Me will prove fruitless, O vile wretch. Indeed, if while in the clutches of My enemy I do not see My husband, who is equal to the gods, I shall not be able to continue living for long. Obviously you are not really concerned with your ultimate good or even your immediate good, just as a man who is on the verge of death does

things detrimental to his survival. Usually those who are about to die do not care to do what is best for themselves. I can see that you have the noose of death wrapped around your neck, for you are not afraid to embark on this dangerous undertaking, O ten-headed Rāvaṇa.

“Surely you must be seeing golden trees very clearly, which indicate approaching death. Very soon you will see the frightening Vaitaraṇī River which flows with blood, and the fearful grove of trees that have swords for leaves. You will also see a śālmālī tree covered with sharp iron thorns and which bear flowers of wrought gold and leaves of vaidurya gems. Having carried out such a misdeed against the great soul Rāma, you will not be able to stay alive for long, like a person who has drunken poison, O merciless one. You are caught in Death’s noose, O Rāvaṇa, which is very difficult to counteract. Where can you go to for protection from My husband? In just a short time, without the assistance of His brother, Rāma disposed of fourteen thousand rākṣasas in the wilderness. Why would He, being expert in the use of all weapons and a mighty warrior, not be able to kill with His sharp arrows you, who are kidnapping His dear wife?”

Uttering these and other similarly harsh words, Sītā, who was in the embrace of Rāvaṇa, being dismayed due to fear and anguish, wept piteously. As Sītā, who was completely entrapped, talked ruefully after excessive crying, Her limbs began to tremble.

RĀVAṆA TAKES SĪTĀ TO LAṆKĀ

Not finding anyone who could rescue Her as She was being carried away, She saw five monkey leaders sitting on a mountain top. The broad-eyed Sītā took off Her sparkling jewelry and wrapped it in Her golden silk veil. This She tossed in the midst of the monkeys that they might relay to Lord Rāma the news of Her being abducted. Rāvaṇa did not see Her do this because of his haste. With their tawny, unblinking eyes, the monkeys then saw the broad-eyed Sītā who was wailing. Passing Pampā Lake and facing the direction of the city of Laṅkā, the lord of the rākṣasas continued travelling while holding the weeping Sītā. Rāvaṇa was highly delighted to be kidnapping Sītā, who would be the cause of his death, like carrying in one's arms an extremely venomous serpent with sharp fangs. Flying through the air like an arrow fired from a bow, he quickly left behind forests, rivers, mountains and lakes. Reaching the ocean which is the destination of rivers, the residence of Varuṇa and the abode of whales and crocodiles, he went beyond it. While Sītā was being abducted, the ocean's waves ceased to swell and the fish and large serpents stopped moving out of fear. At that time, the cāraṇas and siddhas watching from the clouds remarked: "This will be Rāvaṇa's end."

Tightly embracing Sītā, who was the dispenser of his own death, Rāvaṇa entered the city of Laṅkā. After arriving in Laṅkā, which had well-paved roads and gateways thronged with people, Rāvaṇa entered his own private quarters. There he placed Sītā, whose beautiful eyes were dark around the edges and who was completely overcome with grief, like the demon Maya when defeated by Lord Śiva. The ten-headed Rāvaṇa then instructed hideous witches as follows: "Make sure that no unauthorized man or woman sees Sītā. Whatever She desires—whether pearls, gems, garments or jewelry—should be given to Her as if I had requested it. One who utters any unkind word to Sītā, whether knowingly or unknowingly, does not care to live."

Having said this to the rākṣasīs, the powerful lord of the rākṣasas left his living quarters, thinking about what to do next. He went to see eight flesh-eating rākṣasas who were most heroic. Being deluded on account of the boon which he had received from Lord Brahmā, when he saw them, he praised them for their strength and courage and spoke the following words: “Equipping yourselves with numerous weapons, immediately go to Janasthāna, which was previously Khara’s residence but whose buildings have been destroyed. Relying on your own ingenuity and strength and abandoning all fear at a distance, take up residence in the desolate Janasthāna whose rākṣasas have all been slain. The great army that was stationed in Janasthāna, along with Khara and Dūṣaṇa, has been butchered in combat by the arrows of Rāma. Consequently, an anger has arisen in me that is beyond all limits and is unbearable, and I have developed an intense and fearsome enmity with Rāma. I want to end that enmity with my enemy. I shall not get any sleep until I have killed my enemy in battle. I shall now attain peace only after slaying Rāma, the murderer of Khara and Dūṣaṇa, as a pauper would on achieving wealth. While you are staying in Janasthāna you should relay to me correct information about what Rāma is doing. All the night-stalkers should travel vigilantly and you should always endeavor to kill Rāma. I have recognized your strength on the front line of battle. Therefore I have selected you to go to Janasthāna.”

After the rākṣasas received from Rāvaṇa this order which was pleasing and full of meaning, they took leave of Rāvaṇa. Leaving Laṅkā, they all together departed for Janasthāna without being seen. Thereafter, having attained Sītā, having placed Her in his private residence, and having established the highest enmity with Rāma, Rāvaṇa felt elated because of his delusion.

RĀVAṆA SHOWS SĪTĀ HIS PALACE

When Rāvaṇa finished instructing the eight fierce and powerful rākṣasas, he thought that he had achieved his goals because of the perversity of his intelligence. Thinking of Sītā and being pierced by the arrows of Cupid, he hurriedly entered his pleasant quarters. When Rāvaṇa entered his private chamber, he saw Sītā despondent in the midst of rākṣasīs. Her face was wet with tears. She looked wretched and was being crushed by the weight of sorrow. She was like a boat being tossed about by strong winds and which was sinking in the ocean. She was like a deer that had strayed from the herd and was surrounded by dogs. The night-stalker approached Sītā, who was sitting with Her face turned downward because of the pangs of sorrow. Rāvaṇa forced the crest-fallen Sītā to see his palace, which was like the residence of the gods.

The palace was replete with numerous quarters. It was crowded with flocks of birds and adorned with many different gems. It was supported by pleasing columns wonderfully encrusted with wrought gold, silver, crystal, diamonds and chrysoberyl. It resounded with the pleasing sound of kettle drums. The archways were fashioned with wrought gold. Rāvaṇa ascended with Sītā a wonderful staircase of gold. Along the staircase were latticework air vents whose pleasant-looking small openings were in the shape of cows' eyes and which were decorated with ivory and gold. There were rows of palaces whose large windows were screened with gold lattices. The ten-headed Rāvaṇa showed Sītā the floors of his palace which were inlaid all around with many varieties of gems. Rāvaṇa showed Sītā, who was completely grief-stricken, deep lotus ponds surrounded by many trees.

After showing Sītā his entire palace, the sinful wretch spoke the following words in order to seduce Her: "Not counting the old and young, there are three million two hundred thousand rākṣasas capable of frightful deeds. And I am the lord of all of them, O Sītā. Out of them, one thousand are disposed to serve me in any way I see fit. The entire administration of

this kingdom of mine is consecrated to You. O broad-eyed lady, You are more important to me than my own life. My dear Sītā, become my wife, the principal queen among my many thousands of wives. Just accept my request. What is the use of considering any other choice? Choose me. You should be merciful to me, burning as I am with love for You. This land of Laṅkā is surrounded by thousands of powerful rākṣasas and covers a distance of one hundred yojanas. It cannot be captured by all the demigods and demons, even when led by Lord Indra. I do not see anyone among the gods, yakṣas, gandharvas, or birds who is equal to me in valor. What will You do with the human Rāma, who has lost His kingdom, is destitute, is an ascetic, is about to die and has very little strength? Choose me, O Sītā. I am a suitable husband for You. Youth is certainly temporary. Enjoy with Me, O timid woman.

“Do not think of seeing Rāma anymore, my lovely lady. He cannot come here even in thought, O Sītā. A swift wind cannot be bound in the sky with ropes, nor can one grab with the hand a smokeless flame of fire. I do not see anyone in all the three worlds who can by his prowess take You when you are protected by my arms. Rule over this vast kingdom of Laṅkā. All other rākṣasas like myself, even the gods and all moving and nonmoving things will be Your servants. After You have bathed Yourself with suitable water and feel refreshed, come and enjoy with me. Your guilt for any previous wrong action has been annulled by Your stay in the forest. Now enjoy the fruits of whatever pious deeds You may have performed. Enjoy with me all these divine-smelling flower garlands and pieces of jewelry that are here, O princess of Mithilā. Here is the aerial vehicle called Puṣpaka which belonged to my half-brother Kuvera. It is as brilliant as the sun and it was won by my strength, O shapely lady. That excellent vehicle is spacious and pleasurable. Enjoy as You please with me while riding in it. Your face which is spotless like a lotus and pleasing to behold does not look well due to Your being stricken with grief.”

Covering Her moon-like face with the end-piece of Her sari, Sītā began shedding tears. She was thinking of Rāma. She was miserable, did not look healthy and had lost Her luster due to anxiety. The sinful lord of the rākṣasas, Rāvaṇa, then spoke the following words: “Enough of this shame over breaking religious principles! Your union with me has been approved by

the sages as a legal form of marriage. Place the soles of Your two feet upon my heads. Be merciful to me immediately. I am Your obedient servant. These empty words of mine were spoken out of feelings of love, for Rāvaṇa never bows his head to any woman!”

After speaking in this way to Sītā, Rāvaṇa, who was ensnared in death’s trap, thought: “Now She is mine.”

RĀVAṆA SENDS SĪTĀ TO THE AŚOKA GARDEN

After Sītā had been spoken to in that way, She became frightened and stricken with grief. Holding a blade of grass between Herself and Rāvaṇa, She spoke to it as follows: “There was a king named Daśaratha who was an unflinching supporter of righteousness. He was true to his word and renowned. His son is named Rāma. He is a righteous soul and famous throughout the three worlds. He has long arms and broad eyes. He is my husband and object of worship. Born in the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, He has shoulders like a lion’s and is exceedingly effulgent. Along with His brother Lakṣmaṇa, He will take away your life. If you had tried to forcibly abduct Me in His presence, you would be lying dead on the battlefield of Janasthāna like Khara. All those powerful and hideous-looking rākṣasas whom you have ordered to Janasthāna will be powerless before Rāma, as snakes become venomless in the presence of Garuḍa. Gilded arrows fired from His bow string will destroy your body, as the waters of the Ganges eat away its banks.

“Even if you cannot be killed by demons or gods, O Rāvaṇa, you will not escape alive after having established enmity with Rāma. The powerful Rāma will put an end to whatever life you have left. Like an animal bound to a sacrificial post, your life is most difficult to save. If you were now seen by Rāma’s eye inflamed with anger, you would be immediately burnt to ashes and proceed to the netherworld. He who can make the moon fall out of the sky or destroy it, or who can dry up the ocean, can come here and free Sītā. Because of what you have done, your life is finished, your wealth is spent, your power is depleted, your senses are worn out and Laṅkā is a widow. This sinful deed of yours will not be conducive to happiness, in that you have taken Me away from My husband while He was absent in the forest. Depending on His own prowess, My husband, who possesses divine strength and abundant bodily luster, lives fearlessly in the Daṇḍakāranya Forest.

“By the shower of His arrows on the battlefield, He will extract from your limbs your pride, strength, courage and the impropriety of your transgressions. When in the due course of time the destruction of all beings comes about, people commit detrimental errors in the execution of their duties. Because you have kidnapped Me, O lowest of rākṣasas, death has arrived for the destruction of you and the rākṣasas of this palace. A pariah cannot trample upon an altar set up in a sacrificial pavilion decorated with flower garlands and ceremonial utensils and purified with mystic incantations by the twice-born. In the same way, because I am the legally wedded wife of a husband ever-dedicated to righteousness, and am devoted to Him, you, a sinner and lowest of rākṣasas, cannot touch Me. Why would a female swan, who always sports with a royal swan among the clusters of lotus flowers, look at a cormorant standing in the reeds? Put this insentient body in chains or eat it up. I cannot maintain this body or My life, O rākṣasa. I cannot give Myself a bad name in this world.”

After speaking harsh words to Rāvaṇa due to anger, Sītā did not say anything more at that time. Upon hearing Sītā’s biting remarks which were hair-raising, the frightful-looking Rāvaṇa replied as follows: “Listen to my words, O Sītā! I shall wait for twelve months. If after that time period You do not choose to accept me, my cooks will cut You into little pieces for my breakfast.” After speaking so harshly to Sītā, Rāvaṇa, who caused his enemies to wail, angrily gave the following orders to the rākṣasīs: “O rākṣasīs who consume flesh and blood! O you creatures of deformed bodies and hideous appearances! Quickly take away Her pride!”

Upon hearing his command, the crowd of fearsome rākṣasīs joined their palms respectfully and surrounded Sītā. That hideous King Rāvaṇa took a few steps toward them, his feet seemingly rending the earth, and said to them: “Take this princess of Mithilā to the middle of the Aśoka Garden! Stand guard around Her and keep Her hidden away. By means of fierce threats and consolation, bring Her under control as one would a wild she-elephant.”

Receiving this order from Rāvaṇa, the rākṣasīs took Sītā to the Aśoka Garden. It was crowded with trees whose fruits satisfied all one’s

desires. Their flowers and fruits were of every kind. The garden was frequented by birds that eat its fruits all year long. Sītā's body ached all over due to grief. Being overpowered by the rākṣasīs, She felt like a doe surrounded by tigers. Being gripped with great anxiety, the timid Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, could get no relief, like a deer caught in a trap. Being direly threatened by those rākṣasīs with misshaped eyes, Sītā found no peace. Remembering Her beloved husband who was Her object of worship, She lost consciousness due to the pangs of fear and grief.

AS HE RETURNS, RĀMA MEETS LAKṢMAṆA

After killing the deceptive rākṣasa Mārīca, who was roaming about in the guise of a deer, Lord Rāma quickly returned to the path leading back to the cottage. As He hurried along with the desire to see Sītā, a jackal howled threateningly from behind. Rāma understood that hair-raising howl of the jackal to be a sign of impending danger. Already anxious because of what the rākṣasa Mārīca had yelled, Rāma began thinking as follows: “Alas! I think that by the way that jackal is howling something inauspicious is about to occur. Is Sītā all right? Has She escaped being eaten by the rākṣasas? If Lakṣmaṇa heard the call for help which Mārīca in the guise of a deer purposely made in imitation of My voice, would He have left Sītā? Would He be hurriedly coming to Me after having been sent by Sītā? Surely the rākṣasas all together wish to kill Sītā. The fact that Mārīca assumed the form of a deer to lead Me far away from the cottage and then, when shot with an arrow, called out: “O Lakṣmaṇa, I am injured!” make Me doubt whether everything is all right with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa in My absence. For, by destroying Janasthāna I struck up enmity with all the rākṣasas. Indeed, I now see many evil omens.”

Thinking in this way after hearing the jackal’s howl, Rāma quickly returned along the path back to the cottage. In anxiety because of His having been lured away by the rākṣasa in the guise of a deer, Rāma proceeded toward Janasthāna. Rāma’s mind became further depressed when He noticed that birds and beasts were passing Him on the left and making fierce sounds. Seeing all these omens of great misfortune, Lord Rāma quickly returned to His cottage. Thinking of the lovely Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma proceeded to Janasthāna. Thereafter He saw Lakṣmaṇa devoid of effulgence coming. Before long Lakṣmaṇa, who was despondent and sad, met Rāma, who was also despondent and sad. Rāma began chastising Lakṣmaṇa

for having left Sītā alone in the wilderness frequented by rākṣasas. Taking Lakṣmaṇa's left hand, Rāma spoke the following harsh and pained words whose consequence was sweet:

“O Lakṣmaṇa, You have committed a blameworthy act by leaving Sītā to come here. My dear brother, could Sītā possibly be all right at this time? I am fully certain, O warrior, that Sītā has either been killed or eaten by rākṣasas dwelling in the forest, as I have seen many inauspicious omens. Will We be able to find Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka, unharmed and alive, O tiger among men? By the way that the deer, jackals and vultures are howling fiercely while facing the direction of the blazing sun, how could the princess be all right? This rākṣasa resembling a deer who lured Me far away was killed only after a great effort and then became a rākṣasa again after dying. My mind is not at all pleased but is depressed and My left eye is twitching. O Lakṣmaṇa, undoubtedly Sītā is not at the cottage. Either She has been abducted, is on the way to some other place, or has been killed.”

RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA REACH THE COTTAGE

Seeing Lakṣmaṇa depressed and without Sītā, the virtuous Rāma questioned Him about why He had come without Sītā: “O Lakṣmaṇa, where is Sītā, who followed Me to this Daṇḍakā Forest and whom You abandoned to come here? Where is that thin-waisted Sītā who shared My sorrow and ran around with Me in the Daṇḍakā Forest after I lost My kingdom and was dispirited? Where is that Sītā like a daughter of the gods, who is My life-long assistant and without whom I cannot bear to live for more than a moment? O

Lakṣmaṇa, without the golden-complexioned daughter of King Janaka I do not care for lordship over the immortals nor over the earth! Is Sītā, who is dearer to Me than My own life, still alive? I hope that My exile to the forest is not rendered void by the loss of Sītā. O son of Sumitrā, I am sure that Kaikeyī will be happy with the fulfillment of her desires when You return alone without Me, for I will have died on account of the loss of Sītā. Will Kausalyā, becoming an ascetic because of her son’s death, serve Kaikeyī, whose son is enjoying the kingdom and the attainment of her goals? Will Sītā be alive when I return to the cottage? If that lady of good conduct is dead, I shall give up My life, O Lakṣmaṇa. If Sītā does not speak to Me with a smile when I return to the cottage, I shall perish.

“Tell Me, O Lakṣmaṇa, whether Sītā is alive or not, or whether She was devoured by rākṣasas because You failed in Your duty. Being youthful, young and having never experienced sorrow, obviously She must be worried and lamenting due to separation from Me. Clearly that wicked and deceitful rākṣasa frightened You by crying out “O Lakṣmaṇa.” I fear Sītā must have heard that call for help that resembled My voice. Being sent by Her when She was very frightened, You have quickly come to see Me. But You have in every way committed a blunder by leaving Sītā in the wilderness, for You have given an opportunity of revenge to the merciless rākṣasas. The flesh-eating rākṣasas who were distressed by the slaughter of Khara must have

slain Sītā. Of this there is no doubt. O crusher of enemies, I am completely sunken in this calamity. But what can I do now? I fear that such a disaster has occurred.”

Thinking of Sītā in this way, Rāma hurried to Janasthāna with Lakṣmaṇa. When Rāma, who was hungry, exhausted and thirsty, reached the cottage, He was breathing heavily, had a dry mouth and was pale. Seeing that the cottage was empty, He chastised Lakṣmaṇa, who looked distressed. After entering His cottage, Rāma then proceeded to some of Sītā’s favorite places for amusement. Saying: “These are those same places where Sītā used to enjoy,” He became unsettled and His hair stood on end.

DISCUSSION BETWEEN RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA

When Rāma met Lakṣmaṇa halfway as the former was coming from the cottage, Rāma painfully inquired from Him as follows: “Why have You come leaving Sītā all alone in the forest when She was entrusted in Your care? The fact is, O Lakṣmaṇa, as soon as I saw You coming without Sītā, My mind became disturbed and I became fearful of some great misfortune. When I saw You from a distance on the path, My left eye and left arm began twitching and my heart, pounding.”

When Lakṣmaṇa, whose body was endowed with auspicious marks, was chastised in this way, being greatly distressed, He spoke to the saddened Rāma as follows: “I did not leave Her to come here of My own desire. I was impelled to come to You by Her strong words. Sītā heard a cry apparently by Your noble Self that said: ‘O Sītā! O Lakṣmaṇa! Help!’ Upon hearing that anguished cry, out of affection for You, Sītā, crying and being frightened, said to Me: ‘Go! Go!’ Despite being repeatedly urged by Her to go, I spoke words intended to reassure Her: ‘I do not know of any rākṣasa that can frighten Rāma. Do not worry. That is not His voice but that of someone else. O Sītā, how could My brother, who used to protect the demigods in the heavenly realms, cry out such a despicable and lowly thing as a call for help? Obviously a rākṣasa has made that cry for help in imitation of My brother’s voice for some wicked purpose. You should not exhibit any of the fitful behavior of bad women. Enough of this grief! Calm Yourself! Be at ease! There is no man born or about to be born in any of the three worlds who can defeat Rāma in combat. He cannot be defeated in battle by all the demigods headed by Indra.’

“Her mind being totally bewildered, Sītā shed tears and uttered the following dreadful words to Me: ‘You harbored the sinful desire to have Me as Your own after the demise of Your brother, but You will not have Me. You

are following Rāma because of a secret pact You made with Bharata and therefore You do not run to Rāma when He is crying out in desperation. An enemy in disguise, You have been following Rāma for My sake, seeking some opportunity of weakness. That is why You do not go to Him.’ When Sītā finished speaking to Me in this way, becoming furious, having reddened eyes and lips quivering due to anger, I left from the cottage.”

Distracted by the pain He felt, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “You have committed a great blunder by coming here without Sītā. Although You know that I can repulse the rākṣasas, You left because of Sītā’s angry words. I am definitely not very pleased with You for leaving Sītā to come here because of hearing the harsh words of an angry woman. It was completely unacceptable for You not to carry out My instructions because of falling prey to anger from Sītā’s exhortations. Indeed, that rākṣasa in the guise of a deer that lured Me away from the cottage is now lying killed by My arrow. I placed an arrow on the bow string and pulled it all the way back. When My arrow sportingly stuck him, he gave up his disguise and resumed the form of a rākṣasa adorned with golden armbands, calling out in agony. The moment he was hit by the arrow, he imitated My voice with an anguished shout which could be heard from a great distance. Summoned by that dreadful yell, You have come here leaving Sītā.

RĀMA ASKS THE TREES ABOUT SĪTĀ

While Rāma was returning to His cottage, His lower left eyelid twitched, He stumbled and His whole body trembled. Seeing these inauspicious omens again and again, Rāma said: “I wonder if Sītā is all right.” Eager to see Sītā, He proceeded in a hurry. Seeing the cottage empty, He felt perturbed in mind. Moving as if He were flying, He flung His arms about. Looking here and there around the thatched cottage, He saw that Sītā was not there. The cottage appeared desolate without Sītā, like a lotus withered and shorn of its splendor in the winter. The hermitage had been abandoned by the forest deities; its trees seemed to be crying, its flowers faded, and its deer and birds disconsolate. Black antelope skins and kuśa grass mats were scattered about in disorder. Seeing His home empty, he lamented again and again: “The timid Sītā must have been carried away, or killed, or lost, or eaten, or is hiding, or has taken shelter of the forest. Or perhaps She has gone to pick flowers or fruits, or has gone to the lotus pond or to the river to bring water.”

Although He searched for His dear wife, He did not find Her. With His eyes red from grief, He looked as though He were mad. Running from tree to tree along the slope of the mountain and the bank of the river, drowning in an ocean of sorrow, Rāma lamented as follows: “O kadamba tree, did you see My dear wife who is so fond of kadamba flowers? If you know anything about Sītā, please tell Me. O bilva tree, if you happen to have seen Sītā, whose breasts resemble bilva fruits, please tell Me. She is wearing yellow silk garments and She is like a tender sprig. O arjuna tree, tell Me about My darling who is fond of arjuna flowers—whether the timid daughter of King Janaka is alive or not. Obviously the kakubha tree knows about Sītā, whose thighs are like the smooth limbs of the kakubha tree. Adorned with tender boughs, flowers and vines, this tree looks very beautiful indeed. O tilaka tree, the bumblebees sing your glories, saying you are the best of trees. It is clear that you know about Sītā, who is very fond of your flowers. O aśoka tree, you are the dispeller of grief. Fulfill this name by relieving My

mind of its grief. Quickly let Me see My dear wife! O tāla tree, if you have seen Sītā, whose breasts are like ripened tāla fruits, kindly tell Me so. O jambu tree, if you have seen Sītā, whose effulgence resembles your fruit, or if you know anything definite about Her, please tell Me. O karṇikāra tree, you look very charming today with your abundance of flowers. Tell Me if you have seen the pious Sītā who is fond of your flowers.”

Seeing the glorious mango, kadamba, sāla, jack-fruit, kurava, dhava and pomegranate trees, Rāma approached them. Wandering through the forest, Rāma inquired from the jasmine vines, mādhavī vines, campaka trees and ketakī trees, thus He appeared to be mad. He also spoke to the animals: “O deer, do you know what has happened to Sītā, whose eyes are like those of a fawn? Perhaps my sweetheart who glances like a deer is with the female deer. O elephant, tell Me if you have seen Sītā, whose thighs resemble an elephant’s trunk. I think you know something about Her. Please tell Me. O tiger, tell Me without fear whether you have seen that dear princess of Mithilā who is as effulgent as the moon. You have no need to fear. My dear Sītā, why do You run away? I can see You in the distance, O lotus-eyed one! Why do You hide behind the trees and not show Yourself to Me? Stop! Wait! Do You not have any compassion for Me? You are not inclined to pranks, therefore why do You spurn Me? Your yellow silk garment indicates Your location, O lovely woman. I saw You while You were running. Stop if You have any affection for Me! Or else that was not the sweet-smiling Sītā, who has most likely been killed. Surely She would not have spurned Me when I am in difficulty. Obviously, in My absence, the young woman has been devoured by flesh-eating rākṣasas who divided Her limbs up among themselves.

“Surely Her face, which resembles a full moon, along with its sparkling teeth, aquiline nose and charming earrings, must have lost its brilliance. My beloved’s neck, which is soft, the color of a golden campaka flower and adorned with necklaces, must have been devoured by the rākṣasas. Her two arms were as tender as the new shoots of a tree and were adorned with bracelets and armlets. After excessive flailing and trembling too, they must have been eaten. She was abandoned by Me to be eaten by the rākṣasas. Although She had many relatives, She has been devoured by the rākṣasas like a woman abandoned by Her travelling companion. O

Lakṣmaṇa, do You see My darling anywhere? O My darling, where have You gone? O gentle Sītā!”

Lamenting like this again and again, Rāma ran throughout the forest, sometimes jumping up suddenly and sometimes spinning around with great force. Absorbed in finding His beloved, He now appeared mad. He roamed speedily to forests, rivers, mountains, waterfalls and groves without stopping. Thus he entered the vast, dense jungle, searching everywhere for the princess of Mithilā. Upon not attaining His cherished goal, He again made a great effort to locate His beloved wife.

RĀMA CONTINUES LOOKING FOR SĪTĀ

Rāma saw that the hermitage was empty, the thatched cottage vacant and the grass mats scattered. Looking all around and not seeing Sītā, Rāma lifted His arms up and shouted: “O Lakṣmaṇa, where could Sītā be? To what place could She have gone? Who could have abducted Her, or who could have eaten My darling? O Sītā, if You are playing a game with Me by hiding behind a tree, stop it right now! Forlorn as I am, immediately show Yourself to Me! O gentle one, without You, the trusting fawns that You used to play with are reminiscing about You with tears in their eyes. O Lakṣmaṇa, I cannot live without Sītā. My father will certainly see Me in the netherworld when I have died from the immense grief caused by Sītā’s abduction. He will say to Me: ‘Why have You come here in my presence before the allotted time for Your exile was up, especially since You accepted the order I had given You? Fie on You who are lusty, ignoble and a liar!’ My father will definitely talk to Me like this in the netherworld. O Sītā, You have left Me, a helpless, grief-stricken wretch whose aspirations are shattered, as a good reputation leaves a crooked man! Where are You going, O lovely woman? Do not leave Me! Without You, I shall give up My very life!”

Lamenting in this way, Rāma longed to see Sītā. Not seeing Her, He felt extreme anguish. When He could not find Sītā, He was as disturbed as an elephant caught in a large marsh. Desiring to help Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa said to Him: “O strong warrior, do not be despondent. Make an endeavor with Me as Your assistant. O hero, this forest has many caves. Sītā is fond of wandering in the groves and is enraptured by the forest. She must have gone into the forest or dived into a pond abounding in lotus flowers. Or maybe She went to bathe in the river thronging with fish and reeds. She could be hiding somewhere in the forest as a prank. Or She could be hiding in order to frighten Us or to see what Our ability is in finding Her. Therefore, let Us immediately begin looking for Her, O glorious prince. We shall search every place where Sītā might be in the entire forest, if You agree, O descendant of Kakutṣtha. Do not let Your mind be disturbed.”

After being addressed in such an affectionate way by Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma became calm. Rāma then began searching for Sītā with Lakṣmaṇa. The two sons of King Daśaratha thoroughly searched for Sītā in the forests, mountains, rivers and lakes. Even after searching on the flat summits, caves and peaks of Mount Prasavaṇa, They did not find Her. After searching all over the mountain, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “I do not see the lovely princess here on this mountain.” Then, while wandering about the forest, Lakṣmaṇa, being tormented by sorrow, spoke the following words to His brother: “You will get Sītā back, O most intelligent one, as the mighty Viṣṇu retrieved this earth by binding the demon Bali.”

After Lakṣmaṇa had affectionately consoled Him, Rāma, whose mind was distracted by sorrow, spoke in the following piteous way: “We have already searched the entire forest and its ponds with blooming lotus flowers, as well as this mountain and its many caves. Still I have not found Sītā who is more important to Me than My life.”

Lamenting in this way, Rāma looked wane due to the abduction of Sītā. Submerged in misery and sorrow, He lost control of Himself for a while. Due to His suffering, His limbs trembled, His mind’s intelligence was voided, He heaved hot sighs and was overwhelmed with despondency. Sighing continuously, the lotus-eyed Rāma repeatedly cried out with a voice choked with tears: “O My darling!” Thereafter Lakṣmaṇa humbly tried to console His dear brother in many ways with joined palms. Rāma, however, did not accept those words of consolation sprung from the lips of Lakṣmaṇa. Not seeing His dear Sītā, He simply cried again and again.

RĀMA LAMENTS FOR SĪTĀ

Not seeing Sītā, the righteous Rāma, whose mind was disturbed by the desire to find Sītā, began to lament. Although He did not see Her, He seemingly saw Her and, tormented by love, made the following lamentations with difficulty: “My dear, being very fond of flowers, You are hiding Your body behind the boughs of an aśoka tree, thus increasing My grief. O lady, I can see Your two thighs, which resemble the trunks of banana trees, hidden behind a banana tree. You cannot hide them from Me. As a prank, You have gone into a grove of kaṇṇikāra trees, O gentle lady. Stop this joking which is causing Me distress! Why are You playing this game which is wearing Me out? This game is not very nice at all. Neither is it proper to play such jokes in a hermitage. I understand that Your nature is playful, My dear. Come back, O broad-eyed one! This cottage of Yours is vacant.

“O Lakṣmaṇa, obviously Sītā has been abducted or devoured by rākṣasas, for She does not come to Me even though I am crying out for Her. These herds of deer with tears in their eyes are apparently telling Me that Sītā has been devoured by rākṣasas. O my noble lady, where have You gone? Kaikeyī will now have her wish fulfilled. I left Ayodhyā with Sītā, but now I will return without Her. How can I enter My palace again when it is now desolate? People will say that I am impotent and merciless. In fact, Sītā’s abduction will reveal My cowardice. Once I have returned from exile, how will I be able to look King Janaka, the ruler of Mithilā, in the face when he inquires about My welfare? Certainly when he sees that I am deprived of Sītā, pained because of his affection for Her, he will fall under the sway of delusion.

“Or else I shall never return to Ayodhyā which is now ruled by Bharata. In My opinion, even the heavenly realm is desolate without Sītā. O Lakṣmaṇa, leaving Me here in the forest, go back to the beautiful city of Ayodhyā. I will certainly not be able to survive under any circumstances without Sītā. After tightly embracing Bharata, You should relate to Him the

following message from Me: ‘By the order of Lord Rāma, You should rule over the earth.’ By My order, You should offer respect to My mother Kaikeyī, as well as to Sumitrā and Kausalyā, as is proper. You should also strive to protect them while accepting good counsel. You should relate in detail about the death of Sītā and also of My own to My mother Kausalyā, O destroyer of enemies.” Being disconsolate due to the absence of fine-haired Sītā, Rāma lamented in the forest. Lakṣmaṇa was also mentally perturbed because of all the pain He felt, and His face was pale with fear.

RĀMA CONTINUES TO LAMENT FOR SĪTĀ

Deprived of His dear wife, Rāma was afflicted with grief and the desire for Sītā. His condition inflicted His younger brother with sorrow, thus Rāma again entered into intense desperation. Heaving hot sighs and crying, Rāma spoke to Lakṣmaṇa the following words which were appropriate for the misfortune: “I think there is no one else on the face of the earth who has committed sinful deeds as I have. Thus sorrow after sorrow is successively breaking My heart and afflicting My mind. I certainly must have carefully planned and perpetrated sinful deeds in previous lives. The reaction of those has now arrived—I am going from one misery to another. O Lakṣmaṇa, when I ponder the loss of My kingdom, the separation from My relatives, the demise of My father and the separation from My mother, the intensity of My anguish increases. All this misery of Mine compounded with physical discomfort from living in the forest vanished due to the company of Sītā. Due to separation from Sītā it has all come back again, as a fire flares up suddenly when fuel is thrown on embers.

“Surely My timid Sītā must have been constantly wailing with a piteous voice as She was being forcibly carried away by a rākṣasa up into the sky. My darling’s two round breasts that deserved to be smeared with first-class red sandalwood paste, which is so pleasing to see, must be covered with thick, coagulated blood, yet I do not drop dead. Sītā’s face, which uttered soft yet distinct and sweet words and which bore a mass of curly hair, having fallen into the hands of a rākṣasa, must not look very well, like the moon in the grips of an eclipse. The blood-thirsty rākṣasas must have slit Sītā’s throat, which was always adorned with pearl necklaces, and drunken Her dry. While She was all alone in the forest in My absence, the rākṣasas will have abducted Her by dragging Her away. At that time, due to Her agony, Sītā must have cried out like a female osprey.

“Seated with Me here on this slab of rock, the sweet smiling Sītā who was given to laughter used to say so many things to You, O Lakṣmaṇa. This Godāvārī River has always been very dear to Her. I think She might have gone there, but She never went there alone before. Being very fond of lotus flowers, the lotus-eyed Sītā probably went to pick some. But that is not likely, for She never went to pick lotus flowers without Me. Perhaps She has gone to that grove of flowering trees frequented with flocks of many kinds of birds. But the timid and chaste lady was afraid to go into the forest on Her own.

“O sun, you are the knower of the past and future and the witness of everyone’s good and evil deeds. Please tell Me where My darling has gone or where She has been taken to, for I am constantly suffering the pangs of grief. O wind, there is not anything in all the worlds which you do not know. Please tell Me whether She has been kidnapped, or killed, or is on Her way to some other place.”

While Rāma was weeping, His mind was distracted and His body overwhelmed with sorrow. Lakṣmaṇa, who was not depressed, being fixed in doing what was best, spoke the following timely advice: “Give up Your grief, O noble brother, and compose Yourself. Be eager to search for Sītā, for men who are enthusiastic never give up even in undertakings that are most difficult to achieve.” Rāma did not notice Lakṣmaṇa speaking these words because of the pain He felt. Instead He again lost all composure and became further distraught.

RĀMA FINDS TRACES OF SĪTĀ

Miserable as He felt, Rāma spoke the following piteous words to Lakṣmaṇa: “Go immediately to the Godāvarī River and find out whether Sītā has gone there to pick lotus flowers.” After receiving this order from Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, the destroyer of opposing warriors, went with hurried steps to the charming Godāvarī River. When Lakṣmaṇa finished searching all the fords and bathing places along the river, He said to Rāma: “I did not find Her at any of the bathing places by the river, nor did She hear Me calling for Her. I wonder where Sītā, who by Her very nature drove away discomfort, could have gone. I have no idea where Sītā might be.”

Upon hearing Lakṣmaṇa’s report, Rāma was so distressed and bewildered that He personally went down to the Godāvarī River. When Rāma reached the river, he asked it: “Where is Sītā?” Since even the living entities there did not tell Rāma that Sītā had been abducted by Rāvaṇa, who therefore deserved to be killed, the river also did not reply. The five principal material elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—urged the river to tell Rāma about His darling. However, even when requested by Rāma, the river did not give any information about Sītā. In fact, remembering that frightful form and heinous deeds of the wicked Rāvaṇa, out of fear the river did not say anything about Sītā to Rāma.

Rāma was disappointed with the river because of not seeing Sītā, Feeling devastated from not seeing Sītā, He said the following to Lakṣmaṇa: “This Godāvarī River does not respond at all. O Lakṣmaṇa, what shall I tell King Janaka when I meet him, or Sītā’s mother when I am without Her? Where could Sītā have gone? She assuaged My grief when I was exiled from My kingdom and forced to live in the wilderness on forest products. I think that I will be unable to sleep during the long nights because of separation from My family relatives and the absence of Sītā. I shall serve the Mandākinī River, Janasthāna and Mount Prasravaṇa if I find Sītā there.

“O Lakṣmaṇa, these deer are looking at Me again and again with the desire to speak to Me. I can understand this from the way they are gesturing.” While looking at them with eyes brimming with tears, Rāma asked: “Where is Sītā?” When questioned by Rāma, the deer suddenly rose up and all pointed toward the sky in a southerly direction. Then, while looking back at Rāma, they ran along a path in the direction to which Sītā had been carried. The deer would repeatedly look up at the sky and then at the ground in order to indicate the direction in which Sītā had been taken. By making gestures, the deer indicated everything that words could, and Lakṣmaṇa understood them. As if He were distressed, the wise Lakṣmaṇa said to His brother: “Because the deer sprang to their feet when You asked them where Sītā was, and then pointed to the sky and toward the south, let Us proceed in a southerly direction. We might find some trace of Her there, or perhaps Sītā Herself.” Saying, “All right,” Rāma set out toward the south, gazing at the ground, with Lakṣmaṇa following behind. While the two brothers were conversing, They saw a trail of flowers fallen on the ground. Seeing those flowers scattered on the ground, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “I recognize these flowers. I gave them to Sītā in the forest and She tied them to Her hair. I think the sun god, wind god and the glorious earth preserved these flowers as a favor to Me.”

After speaking in this way to the strong-armed Lakṣmaṇa, the best of men Rāma addressed Mount Prasravaṇa: “My dear lord of mountains, did you happen to see in some charming part of the forest a woman whose bodily limbs were all beautiful and who was without Me?” Becoming angry on not receiving a reply, Rāma treated the mountain as a lion would a dwarf deer: “Show Me Sītā of golden complexion, O mountain, before I destroy all your peaks!” When commanded in this way by Rāma, the mountain seemed to be revealing Sītā, though it did not actually reveal Her to Rāma.

Then Rāma again addressed the mountain: “I will burn you to ashes with My flaming arrows. Deprived of grass, trees and twigs, your entire surface will be rendered uninhabitable. O Lakṣmaṇa, I shall also immediately dry up this Godāvārī River, if it does not tell Me about the noble Sītā, whose face is as effulgent as the full moon.” Thus being enraged, Rāma was ready to consume the river with His eyes. Then He noticed a rākṣasa’s huge footprint pressed into the ground. He also saw the footprints of the terrified Sītā, who

had run here and there to reach Rāma while She was being pursued by the rākṣasa. With His heart perplexed by seeing the footprints of Sītā and of the rākṣasa, as well as a broken bow and quiver, and a shattered chariot, He said to His dear brother: “Lakṣmaṇa, see these gold particles broken from Sītā’s ornaments and these many flowers from Her garland. Also notice the drops of blood resembling molten metal scattered all over the surface of the ground. I think Sītā must have been torn into pieces and eaten by rākṣasas who can assume any form at will. And here fiercely contending rākṣasas did battle for the sake of Sītā.

“My dear brother, whose is this great bow encrusted with pearls and gold filigree that lies broken on the ground? Whose is this armor lying shattered on the ground and which is as shiny as the newly risen sun and is encrusted with vaidurya gems? And whose is this one hundred-ribbed parasol trimmed with a shimmering, heavenly garland which is fallen on the ground with its pole broken? Whose are these huge-bodied mules with goblin heads and gold breast-plates that have been killed in conflict? Whose is this war chariot which shines like a flame and which is smashed and overturned with its battle flag? Whose are these gilded arrows capable of frightful action which are like the axle of a chariot, but which are broken and headless? Look, Lakṣmaṇa, a pair of broken quivers full of arrows! Whose is this charioteer lying dead with the reins still in his hands? These footprints are obviously of some rākṣasa. My dear brother, just see how My enmity with the fierce-hearted rākṣasas has increased one hundred times for putting an end to their lives!

“The austere Sītā has been abducted, killed or eaten! Her virtue did not protect Her from being carried away into the wilderness. Since Sītā has been devoured or abducted, even the gods cannot do anything worse to Me. All living beings would out of ignorance disdain the creator of this world if He merely felt sorry about this misfortune and did not act. Because I am mild-mannered, engaged in the welfare of the world, disciplined and compassionate, surely the gods think that I am not virile.

“Just see how My attainment of these virtues has turned them into faults. Shunning all those virtues, My vigor is now manifesting for the destruction of all living beings, including the rākṣasas, as the heat of the sun

takes away the coolness of moonbeams! Neither yakṣas, gandharvas, goblins, rākṣasas, kinnaras or men will be able to find any happiness. Watch as I fill the sky with missiles and arrows, O Lakṣmaṇa! Now I will prevent the movement of the living beings in all three worlds. I shall bring the three worlds to ruination by stopping the movement of the planets, veiling the moon, destroying fire and wind, blocking the light of the sun, smashing mountain peaks, drying up all sources of fresh water, destroying trees, bushes and vines, and emptying the oceans. If the gods in charge of this world do not return Sītā to Me, in a short time they will see My prowess, O Lakṣmaṇa! Because of the continuous network of arrows released from My bow string, no creatures will be able to fly through the sky. See how My steel arrows destroy the world, creating confusion and destroying the bonds of propriety, with all the beasts and birds destroyed or fled away. Shooting with full force arrows that are difficult to be counteracted by living beings, I shall rid the world of goblins and rākṣasas on account of Sītā! Today the gods will see the strength of the arrows impelled by anger that I shoot and which can strike at a great distance.

“When My anger flairs up against the three worlds, there will no longer be any gods, demons, goblins or rākṣasas. Torn to pieces by the flood of My arrows, the worlds of the gods, demons, yakṣas and rākṣasas will cease to exist. If the controlling gods do not return Sītā to Me, regardless of whether She has been abducted or is dead, I shall this very day with My arrows dissolve all the boundaries of these worlds. If they do not return My beloved to Me in Her original condition, I shall destroy all the three worlds of moving and nonmoving beings.”

After saying this, Rāma’s eyes became as red as copper due to anger and He gripped His bow tightly. Then Rāma, the conqueror of enemy strongholds, lifted His bow, took a fearsome blazing arrow like a poisonous snake and fixed it on the bow. Manifesting anger like the universal fire at the end of the world, He said the following: “As much as none of the living entities are capable of warding off old age, death, time or destiny, it is entirely impossible to counteract Me when I am angry. If they do not immediately return Sītā, who is faultless, as She was previously, then I shall overturn this world with its gods, gandharvas, men, serpents and mountains.”

LAKṢMAṆA CONSOLES RĀMA

Rāma was tormented and emaciated by Sītā's abduction and determined to destroy the world like the conflagration at the end of the world. Glancing at His strung bow, He sighed again and again. He was desirous of burning the whole world, as Lord Śiva does at the end of the age. Seeing such anger in Rāma as had never been seen before, Lakṣmaṇa joined His palms and spoke with a parched mouth as follows: "Having previously been mild-mannered, disciplined and engaged in the welfare of all living beings, You should not abandon this nature by coming under the sway of anger. As beauty resides in the moon, brilliance in the sun, movement in the wind and forgiveness in the earth, these as well as unexcelled fame reside in You. You should not destroy the worlds because of one person's offence. I shall indeed discover the owner of this war chariot, as well as who destroyed it and its equipment, and for what reason. This ground has been cut by the hooves of horses and the fellies of chariot wheels and is sprinkled with drops of blood. The area looks very awful, O prince, and makes Me think that a battle must have occurred. But this was an encounter involving only one chariot, not two. Nor do I see any trace of footprints from a large army. You should not destroy these worlds because of one person's misdeeds, for monarchs are just in punishment, mild and calm. You are always the shelter of all living beings and their supreme destination.

"Who would approve of the elimination of Your wife, O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty? The rivers, oceans, mountains, gods, gandharvas and demons are incapable of displeasing You, as the saintly priests are unlikely to displease the person consecrated to perform a sacrifice. O king, with Me wielding a bow and with the help of the topmost sages, You should find the one who abducted Sītā. We shall diligently search the ocean, as well as the mountains, forests, various fearful caves, lotus ponds, and the worlds of the gods and gandharvas until We find Your wife's abductor. If the lords of the heavenly realms do not return Your wife to You, O ruler of Kosala, then You can do what is opportune. If You do not recover Sītā by proper conduct,

conciliation, modesty and prudence, then destroy this world with showers of gold-feathered arrows as formidable as Indra's thunderbolt."

LAKṢMAṆA FURTHER CONSOLES RĀMA

Due to the pangs of grief, Rāma was lamenting like an orphan, had entered into great delusion, and was heart-broken and deranged. After comforting Him for a while, Lakṣmaṇa grabbed hold of Rāma's feet and entreated Him as follows: "O Rāma, King Daśaratha achieved You as his son by the practice of intense austerity and great acts of piety. The king who was the ruler of the earth was enthralled by Your good qualities and achieved the realm of the gods due to separation from You, as You have heard from Bharata. If You are unable to bear this suffering, then what ordinary man would be able to do so? If You consume the worlds with Your might because of Your sorrow, O tiger among men, where will the afflicted living beings be able to find relief? Be courageous, O best of men. What living being does not experience difficulties? These burn one like fire and then withdraw in a second.

"It is the very nature of living beings to undergo difficulties. King Yayāti, the son of Nahuṣa, was able to go live on the same planet with Lord Indra, but by ignorance he fell from heaven. The great sage Vasiṣṭha, who was the family priest of Our father, had one hundred sons born in a day, and then again these were all killed in a day. This earth, who is the mother of mobile living beings, is honored by everyone and is the consort of Lord Viṣṇu, also suffers from quaking. Even the exceptionally powerful sun and moon, who are the promoters of righteousness, the eyes of all living beings, and the foundation of everything in this world, become caught in the throes of an eclipse. O best of men, even very great beings and demigods cannot escape destiny, much less the ordinary embodied entities. Therefore, O tiger among men, You should not lament. Even if Sītā has been killed or abducted, You should not lament like an ordinary person.

"Persons like You, who have seen the truth, never grieve even in the most difficult circumstances, for their outlook is never depressed. Deliberate on this truthfully with intelligence, O tiger among men. Those who are most wise understand what is good and bad through intelligence and reasoning.

Without making some effort, the unseen merits and demerits of actions will not bear their results. In fact, You Yourself have often given Me the same instructions in the past. Indeed, who could instruct You when You are equal to Bṛhaspati, the guru of the demigods? O most wise one, Your intelligence cannot be fathomed by the gods! I am simply trying to resuscitate Your intelligence which has been eclipsed by sorrow. Bearing in mind Your human and divine prowess, strive for the destruction of Your enemies, O bull of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty! What will You accomplish by destroying everything? Ascertaining who Your sinful adversary is, You should eliminate only him.”

RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA FIND JAṬĀYU

Although older, Rāma took Lakṣmaṇa's well-spoken advice, for He was accustomed to accepting what was essential. Controlling His intense anger and leaning on His fine bow, Rāma spoke as follows to Lakṣmaṇa: "What shall We do, My dear brother? Or where shall We go, O Lakṣmaṇa? Think about how We might be able to find Sītā." Lakṣmaṇa replied to Rāma, who was suffering from the pangs of grief, with these words: "You should thoroughly search this region of Janasthāna, which is covered with abundant trees and vines and populated with numerous rākṣasas. This area abounds in mountain gorges, chasms, valleys and various scary caves and is teeming with herds of many different beasts. Here also are found the residences of kinnaras and gandharvas. With Me as Your companion, You should search all those places. Endowed as they are with intelligence, great souls like You are never shaken by adversity, as a mountain is unaffected by the force of the wind."

When requested in this way by Lakṣmaṇa, the furious Rāma placed a deadly razor-sharp arrow on His bow string and roamed throughout the entire forest with Lakṣmaṇa. Thereafter, He saw fallen on the ground that best of birds named Jaṭāyu, who was drenched in blood and who resembled a mountain peak. Seeing that vulture, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: "Undoubtedly Sītā has been eaten by this vulture. This is obviously a rākṣasa in the guise of a vulture that is prowling around in the jungle. Having devoured the broad-eyed Sītā, he is lying here comfortably. I shall kill him with dreadful burning arrows."

After saying this, Rāma ran toward the vulture, fixing a razor-sharp arrow on His bow. As He ran, the angry Rāma caused the land bounded by the sea to apparently tremble. While vomiting foamy blood, the bird spoke the following piteous words to Rāma, the son of King Dasaratha: "That lady whom You are searching for in the wilderness as if She were a life-saving

herb, as well as my own life, have both been taken away by Rāvaṇa. I saw the very mighty Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā while She was alone without You or Lakṣmaṇa. Flying to help Sītā, I engaged in combat with Rāvaṇa. Thus I destroyed his chariot which fell here on the ground. This is Rāvaṇa's broken bow and these are his arrows. This is his war chariot which I destroyed, O Rāma, and this is his charioteer whom I killed in combat. When I was exhausted from fighting, Rāvaṇa cut off both my wings with his sword. Taking Sītā, he then flew up into the sky. Since I have already been mortally wounded by the rākṣasa, You should not kill me."

Understanding what had happened, Rāma's face became wet with tears. He was doubly afflicted with grief—on account of His beloved Sītā and on account of the vulture. When Rāma heard the dear news about Sītā, He abandoned His great bow, sank to the ground, embraced the vulture king and cried with Lakṣmaṇa because of His double agony over the loss of Sītā and the death of Jaṭāyu. Seeing the vulture lying breathing with difficulty in an inaccessible place. Rāma felt saddened and said to Lakṣmaṇa: "I have lost My kingdom; I have been exiled in the forest; Sītā has been lost; and this bird has been killed. Such is My misfortune, which can even burn fire. If I were to cross the ocean full of water, it would surely dry up because of My bad luck. There is no one more unfortunate than I in this world of moving and nonmoving entities, since I have fallen into this grand trap. This vulture king who was a friend of My father lies dying on the ground because of My ill fortune." Having said this, Rāma petted Jaṭāyu's body continuously, showing him paternal affection. Rāma embraced Jaṭāyu, who was covered in blood because of having his wings chopped off. Sinking to the ground, Rāma uttered the words: "Where is Sītā, who is dearer to Me than My own life?"

JATĀYU EXPIRES

Seeing the vulture struck down on the ground by Rāvaṇa, the amicable Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa: “After struggling on My behalf in a encounter with the rākṣasa, this vulture has been mortally injured and is surely about to loose his life, which is very difficult indeed. The life in this body of his is very faint. And he is loosing the ability to speak as he gazes at Us in confusion. O Jaṭāyu, if you can tell Us anything more about Sītā and how you were slain, please do so. Why did Rāvaṇa kidnap Sītā? What offence did I commit again him that he has abducted My beloved Sītā? How did Sītā’s moon-like face appear at the time She was being abducted, and what did She say, O best of birds? How great is that rākṣasa’s prowess? What does he look like? How does he act? And where does he reside? My dear friend, please answer My questions.”

Staring at Rāma, who was lamenting continuously, Jaṭāyu, who was in a miserable condition, spoke with a faint voice as follows: “Sītā was carried away into the sky by Rāvaṇa, the lord of the rākṣasas, who employed his ability at deception by creating a cover of thick clouds and strong winds. When I became exhausted, the rākṣasa chopped off my wings, my friend. Taking Sītā, he headed toward the south. My life airs are becoming obstructed and my vision is waning. I see golden trees with hair on their tops that resembles uśira grass. He who lost a great treasure the moment Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā will quickly regain it. It was the period of the day known as vinda, but Rāvaṇa was unaware of it. Having kidnapped Your beloved Sītā, Rāvaṇa will soon perish like a fish that has swallowed a hook. Nor should You be anxious about Sītā, for You will soon kill Rāvaṇa in combat and enjoy with Sītā again.”

While the vulture was speaking to Rāma, blood and pieces of flesh flowed from his mouth. However, even though he was dying, he did not become bewildered. Jaṭāyu further said: “Rāvaṇa is the son of the sage

Viśravā and the half-brother of Kuvera, treasurer of the gods.” Saying this, that lord of birds gave up his life, which was difficult for him to maintain in that condition. As Rāma with joined palms pleaded: “Speak! Speak!” the vulture abandoned his gross material body and rose up into the sky in his subtle body. Then the vulture’s head sagged to the ground, his legs stretched out and his body collapsed on to the surface of the ground.

Staring at that dead, red-eyed vulture who resembled a mountain, Rāma, who was afflicted with manifold miseries, said to Lakṣmaṇa: “After living happily for many years here in the Daṇḍakā Forest inhabited by rākṣasas, this bird has now left his body. Having had a long and successful life, he is now lying dead. Indeed it is impossible to escape the effects of time. O Lakṣmaṇa, just see how this vulture, who was My benefactor and who attempted to help Sītā, has been killed by the stronger Rāvaṇa. Rejecting his important hereditary position as ruler of the vultures, he gave up his life for My sake. Indeed, O Lakṣmaṇa, pious, righteous and valiant souls who can give protection to others can be found everywhere, even among the animal species. The agony caused by Sītā’s abduction does not disturb Me as much as this vulture’s death for My sake. This ruler of winged creatures is as worthy of Our respect and honor as Our glorious father King Daśaratha. O Lakṣmaṇa, bring firewood. I shall kindle a fire to cremate the vulture king who gave up his life for Me. Placing his body on a funeral pyre, I shall burn that king of birds who was slain by the rākṣasa Rāvaṇa. O Jaṭāyu, with My permission, go to that transcendental world which is the destiny of those who strictly perform sacrifices and maintain the sacred fires. That destiny is achieved by those who give away land in charity or who never retreat from battle. O vulture king, since I have purified you, you may now go there.”

Then Rāma placed the ruler of birds on the funeral pyre and lit it on fire, feeling as pained as if Jaṭāyu were one of His own relatives. Going into the jungle with Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma pulled up large mahārohī roots and, mashed them and formed them into balls. These He placed on the leaves of kuśa grass spread on the green meadow as an offering to the spirit of the deceased vulture. It is said that Rāma recited on behalf of the bird those prayers which are intended to elevate the deceased to the heavenly realm.

After this, the two sons of King Daśaratha went to the Godāvarī River where They offered libations to the spirit of the vulture. First They bathed in the river, then They offered the libations of water to the deceased vulture according to the directions in scripture. Since the vulture had performed a glorious task difficult to execute by trying to defend Sītā, was killed in battle and then purified by the fact that Lord Rāma performed his funeral rites, he attained that spiritual destination that is most auspicious for the soul. After the two had offered libations of water to Jaṭāyu, They fixed Their minds firmly on finding Sītā. Thereafter They entered the forest and began the search, like Indra and Viṣṇu, the rulers of the gods.

LAKṢMAṆA DISFIGURES AYOMUKHĪ

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa set off on Their journey after offering libations of water to the vulture. They searched for Sītā while travelling in a south-western direction. The two descendants of Ikṣvāku, who carried bows, arrows and swords, proceeded along an untrodden path which was overgrown with bushes, trees and many vines. The path was completely blocked on all sides and was impassible, dense and scary. Travelling with speed, the two powerful princes left behind that great jungle which was very fearful because of the snakes and lions that lived there. After going three krośas beyond Janasthāna, the two energetic warriors entered the Krauñca Forest, which was impenetrable. It was like a mass of many clouds and appeared very pleasant all around. It was teeming with many flocks of birds, and many snakes and beasts. Desiring to find Sītā, the two brothers, who were sorely distressed because of Her abduction, searched for Her here and there.

Then, travelling toward the east for a distance of three krośas, They left behind the Krauñca Forest. Halfway, They saw the hermitage of the sage Mataṅga and nearby a dreadful forest crowded with dangerous birds, beasts and many other creatures. It was completely overgrown with trees. After entering that forest the two sons of King Dasaratha saw a cave that was always covered in darkness and which was as deep as Pātāla. Not far from there, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa saw a gigantic rākṣasī with a hideous face. She was terrifying for those who were not very brave, as well as horrible-looking, big-bellied, sharp-toothed, threatening and tough-skinned. She fed herself on fierce creatures, was haughty and had scattered hair. Approaching the two warriors, She said to Lakṣmaṇa, who was walking in front of Rāma: “Come! Let us enjoy!” and grabbed His hand. Embracing Lakṣmaṇa, she said to Him: “I am called Ayomukhī, Your new acquisition, and You are very dear to me. O valiant lord, You will enjoy with me on these mountain peaks and sandy river banks for the rest of Your life.”

When Lakṣmaṇa, the crusher of enemies, had been spoken to in that way, He became angry, drew his sword and chopped off her ears, nose and breasts. As soon as her ears and nose were cut off, the hideous-looking rākṣasī began bellowing loudly and fled along the same path by which she had come.

Thereafter the two brothers, slayers of Their enemies, proceeded forward vigorously and entered the dense jungle. Joining His palms, the effulgent, strong, moral and pious Lakṣmaṇa spoke to His effulgent brother: “My left arm is trembling constantly, My mind is apparently disturbed and I am seeing mostly inauspicious omens. Therefore, O noble brother, be prepared. Follow My good advice, for these omens indicate impending danger. The shrill cries of this most dreadful bird named vañculaka indicates that We will be victorious in a conflict.” As the two princes were exploring that jungle, They heard a loud sound that seemed to shake the jungle. It was as if the jungle were being engulfed by a violent storm. The sound emanating from the jungle filled the sky. Desirous of ascertaining the cause of that noise, Rāma, with sword drawn and accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa, saw a huge-bodied rākṣasa with a broad chest.

The two brothers approached the rākṣasa standing before Them. The monster was massive, without a neck or head, but only a body with a mouth on his belly. His body was covered with sharp, bristling hair and looked like a big mountain. He was the color of a dark-blue cloud, was fierce and roared like a thundering cloud. In the center of his chest he had one large brown eye with long eyelashes. That eye was blazing like a fire and capable of good vision. He was continually licking his huge mouth full of long fangs. That monster used to devour the fiercest bears, lions, stags and birds. Stretching out his two arms which measured one yojana, he would grab numerous bears, deer and flocks of birds, dragging them into his mouth, especially innumerable leaders of deer herds. The monster was blocking the path of the two brothers when They came near. Therefore the two withdrew to a distance of one krośa and looked at the gigantic, fearful and headless torso surrounded by arms. His name was Kabandha, and by his very nature he was dreadful and terrible to look at.

Extending his long arms, Kabandha forcibly caught hold of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and began squeezing Them with all his strength. Although armed with swords and strong bows, and extremely powerful, the two brothers became helpless when They were being dragged by the monster. Because of His steadfastness, the brave Rāma did not become disturbed. Because of His boyish nature and helplessness, Lakṣmaṇa became very disturbed. In great anxiety, Lakṣmaṇa said to Rāma: “Look at Me helpless in the grips of a rākṣasa! Let the monster eat Me so that You can get free, O Rāma! Offering Me as a sacrifice, escape as best You can! I am convinced that You will recover Sītā before long. When You have regained Your hereditary reign over the earth, You should always remember Me.” When Rāma was thus addressed by Lakṣmaṇa, He replied: “Do not be afraid, O hero! A man like You would never be distressed.”

In the meantime, the cruel demon Kabandha bellowed the following question to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa: “Who are You two with shoulders like a bull and bearing large swords and bows? You have come to this terrible place to become my meal. Tell me the reason why You have come here. You have arrived here just as I was feeling hungry. Armed with swords, bows and arrows, You look like two sharp-horned bulls. Because You have come before me, You will not be able to survive.”

Hearing what the evil-minded Kabandha said, Rāma spoke to Lakṣmaṇa with a dry mouth in the following way: “Going from one disaster to another by loosing Our kingdom and loosing Sītā, We have fallen into the present calamity which threatens to terminate Our lives without having found Her. O Lakṣmaṇa, the influence of time is very great over everyone. Just see how You and I are bewildered by adversity. Surely destiny’s control of everything is not a burden for it. When they are caught in the grips of destiny, even strong warriors skilled in using weapons on the battlefield cannot endure, anymore than a bridge made of sand.” As Rāma was looking at Lakṣmaṇa while saying this, that glorious son of King Daśaratha steadied His mind.

RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA DEFEAT KABANDHA

Seeing the two brothers Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa entrapped in his arms, Kabandha said the following: “Why are You two outstanding warriors so quiet, even though You can see that I am hungry? By fate Your minds are confused and You are destined to become my meal!” When Lakṣmaṇa heard this, He decided to resort to His own prowess and spoke the following opportune and beneficial advice to Rāma: “This lowly rākṣasa captured Us very quickly in the beginning. Therefore let Us immediately cut off his big arms with Our swords. The ability of this dangerous, huge-bodied rākṣasa lies in his arms. Having already conquered everyone else, he now wants to kill Us. O monarch, the killing of persons incapable of defending themselves is repugnant to a king, like the butchering of animals in the performance of a sacrifice.”

When the rākṣasa Kabandha heard this, he became furious. Opening his mouth wide, he attempted to eat Them. Kabandha released Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa from his grip as he tried to toss Them into his mouth. Knowing how to act according to time and place, the two princes used Their swords to chop off Kabandha’s arms at the shoulders as if they were trunks of banana trees. Rāma, who was on Kabandha’s right, cut off his right arm with His sword. Meanwhile Lakṣmaṇa, who was on the left, forcefully cut off his left arm. When Kabandha’s long arms were severed, the gigantic monster fell on the ground and released a groan that shook the earth and filled the sky and all directions. Seeing his arms cut off and his body drenched with blood, in distress he asked the two brave warriors who They were.

Lakṣmaṇa, who possessed auspicious bodily characteristics, responded by explaining who Rāma was: “Here is a descendant of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, King Daśaratha’s son, known by the name Rāma. And you may know that I am His younger brother Lakṣmaṇa. He was exiled to the

forest when His step-mother Kaikeyī interrupted His coronation, and has been wandering in this vast wilderness with His wife and Myself. While this prince as mighty as a god was residing all alone in the forest, a rākṣasa kidnapped His wife. We have come here in search of Her. But who are you and why are you residing in the wilderness with a headless torso, a flaming eye on your chest and broken legs?”

When Kabandha heard this, he became very pleased, remembering an assurance given to him by Indra. Thus he answered Lakṣmaṇa in the following way: “Welcome, O tigers among men! It is my good fortune that I am seeing You. And fortunately these arms that were a cause of bondage for me have been cut off. Listen as I factually explain to You by what misdeed I acquired this horrible form.”

KABANDHA TELLS HIS HISTORY

Kabandha said: “O Rāma, previously I had an inconceivable form endowed with tremendous strength and prowess, and was renowned throughout the three worlds. However, assuming a gigantic form as a rākṣasa which was terrifying for people in general, I used to go around here and there frightening the sages who dwelled in the wilderness. It so happened that a great sage named Sthūla-śirā became angry with me. I once attacked him in the form of a rākṣasa while he was gathering produce from the forest. When he saw me, he uttered the following horrible curse: ‘Let this cruel and contemptible form be your actual identity!’ When I pleaded with the angry sage to withdraw the curse invoked because of my wrongdoing, he replied: “When Rāma severs your arms and cremates your body in this desolate wilderness, you will regain your original large and handsome form.’ O Lakṣmaṇa, know me to be the son of the glorious Danu. I achieved this present form as a deformed monster on the battlefield in the following way.

“Once, after I had been cursed to be a rākṣasa, I pleased Lord Brahmā by practicing austerities. He granted me the boon of a long life. Because of that boon I became puffed-up. Thinking, ‘Since I am blessed to have a long life, what can Indra do to me?’ Based on this understanding, I initiated a fight with Indra on a battlefield. When he hurled his thunderbolt with one hundred limbs at me, it pushed my head and legs into my body. Although I begged him to send me to the court of the lord of death, he did not do so. Instead, he replied as follows: ‘Let Lord Brahmā’s boon that you have a long live be fulfilled.’ Then I replied: ‘By the impact of your thunderbolt, my legs, head and mouth have been destroyed. How will I be able to live for a long time without any food?’

“Indra thereafter made my arms one yojana long and put a mouth with sharp fangs on my belly. With these long arms I used to throw lions, leopards, deer and tigers that roamed all over the forest into my mouth to eat. Indra also said to me: ‘When Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa cut off your arms in a

fight, you will ascend to heaven.’ I used to grab every living creature that I saw in the jungle, thinking that You would thus come into my grasp. Bearing this in mind, I have striven to rid myself of this body in that way. You are that same Rāma. Bless You! I cannot be killed by anyone else. That fact was stated by the sage. When You have purified me with fire, I shall give You some advice and indicate an ally who can help You.”

The righteous soul Rāma replied as follows while Lakṣmaṇa stood watching: “My famous wife Sītā was easily kidnapped by Rāvaṇa while I was away from Janasthāna with My brother Lakṣmaṇa. I only know that rākṣasa’s name, but not his appearance. Nor do We know where he lives or what his strength is. You should be kind enough to help Us who are running around like this due to the grief which afflicts Us. After bringing dry logs broken to pieces by elephants, We will shortly cremate you in a pit which We will dig. Thereafter you can inform Us who has kidnapped Sītā and where She has been taken. Do Us this favor if you actually know something.”

Being requested in this way by Rāma, Kabandha, who was an eloquent speaker, spoke the following kind words: “I have no divine knowledge, nor do I know anything about Sītā. Upon regaining my original form when I am cremated, I shall tell You who can inform You about Sītā and Her abductor. As long as I am not cremated, I am unable to know anything about the mighty rākṣasa who kidnapped Your Sītā, my Lord. My intuitive foresight was nullified by the effect of the curse. By my own doing I received this form which is condemned by the whole world. Therefore, throw me in a pit and burn me in accordance with scriptural rules before the sunset, O Rāma. After that, I will tell You who can inform You about the rākṣasa. You should make friends with that person of just actions, for he will help You. There is nothing he does not know in all the three worlds, for in the past, for some reason or other, he visited all the different worlds.”

KABANDHA TELLS RĀMA TO MEET SUGRĪVA

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa then placed Kabandha in a mountain chasm and set him on fire. Lakṣmaṇa used large burning brands to set the pyre on fire on all sides and thus flames flared up. The fire slowly burned Kabandha's body, which was like a huge lump of butter because of his fat. Very shortly Kabandha left the cremation pyre, rising up like a smokeless flame. His mighty body was dressed in spotless garments and a shimmering garland of flowers. He was very glad. All his limbs were decorated with gold bands and he was very effulgent. All of a sudden he flew up from the funeral pyre. Taking a seat on a brilliant aerial vehicle drawn by swans, he illuminated the ten directions with his tremendous splendor. While situated in the air, Kabandha spoke the following words to Rāma: "Listen, O Rāma, how You can actually regain Sītā. There are six means by which things can be achieved in this world. One who has fallen into adversity can be helped by another who is in adversity. You and Lakṣmaṇa have fallen into tribulation in that You have lost Your kingdom. Because of that calamity You have now suffered the loss of Your wife. Therefore You should make an alliance with someone who is undergoing the same difficulties, O best of those who are amicable. After due consideration, I do not see how You can have any success without doing this.

"Listen, O Rāma, as I speak. There is a monkey named Sugrīva. He was deposed by his angry brother Vālī, son of Lord Indra. He lives with four other monkeys on Rśyamūka Mountain, which skirts beautiful Lake Pampā. That monkey chieftain is most heroic. He is energetic, immeasurable in effulgence, true to his promise, well-behaved, determined, intelligent, big, talented, bold, effulgent, very strong and capable. He was exiled by his powerful brother in order to usurp the kingdom. He will certainly be a helpful friend to You in Your search for Sītā. Therefore, O Rāma, do not lament. That which is supposed to happen cannot be stopped by any means.

O tiger of the Ikṣvāku Dynasty, it is indeed impossible to escape the course of destiny. Immediately leave this place and go to that mighty Sugrīva to make friends with him. Establish friendship with him before a blazing fire as the witness so that You never have enmity between You. You should never disregard the monkey chief Sugrīva, for he is grateful, capable of assuming any form, heroic and competent to assist You.

“Indeed, You two are capable of helping him achieve his desired goal. Whether or not he achieves his goal, though, he will help You achieve Yours. Sprung from the loins of the sun god, that successor to King Ṛkṣarāja roams about on the bank of Lake Pampā in anxiety because of Vālī’s animosity toward him. Quickly go to Ṛśyamūka Mountain, lay down Your weapons and establish friendship with the monkey Sugrīva by a solemn oath. Indeed, that exceptional monkey knows all the places where the man-eating rākṣasas live in this world because of his cleverness. In fact, there is nothing he does not know in this world. O crusher of foes, for as long as the thousand-rayed sun continues to shine, he will search for Your wife with his monkeys at rivers, big mountains, precipices and caves. He will send large-bodied monkeys to look everywhere for Sītā, who is lamenting due to separation from You. He will discover that place where Rāvaṇa is keeping the faultless Sītā. Regardless of whether She is on the top of Mount Meru or in the depths of the underworld Pātāla, that best of monkeys will enter that place, slay the rākṣasas and return Your beloved Sītā to You.”

KABANDHA SHOWS RĀMA THE WAY TO R̥ŚYAMŪKA MOUNTAIN

After explaining to Rāma the means of finding Sītā, Kabandha, spoke the following useful words: “Going westward, this is the lucky path, O Rāma, where stand these flowering trees so pleasing to the mind. They are of many varieties, such as jambū, priyāla, jackfruit, plakṣa, banyan, tiṇḍuka, āśvattha, karṇikāra, mango, dhanu, nāgakesara, tilaka, naktamālaka, blue āśoka, kadamba, karavīra, agnimukhya, āśoka, red sandalwood and neem. By climbing them or by pulling their branches down by force, You should eat their nectarean fruits as You go on Your way. When You have gone beyond that region, You will come to a forest of flowering trees flowing with nectar and which bear whatever fruits one desires during all the seasons of the year, just like the Nandana Garden of Uttarakuru. Moreover all the seasons of the year are always present there simultaneously, just like the garden of Citraratha of Kuvera. Having large branches, the trees are bent down due to the weight of their fruits. Resembling mountainous clouds, they beautify the forest on all sides. By climbing them or pulling down their branches, Lakṣmaṇa will easily pluck their nectarean fruits to offer to You.

“Passing over that wonderful land from mountain to mountain and from forest to forest, You will come to the lotus lake called Pampā. There is no loose sand or slippery mud that might cause one to slip on its banks, and these are level and free from reeds. The lake’s bottom is covered with sand and the lake itself is adorned with lotus flowers and water lilies. Swimming in Lake Pampā’s waters, swans, ducks, herons and ospreys produce pleasant sounds by honking and cooing. Because they have never experienced being hunted, they do not become frightening when seeing humans. You will feed those large, fat birds and exceptional fish. Lakṣmaṇa will pull up tubers from the shore of Lake Pampā, peel them with the sharp edge of Your arrowheads so that there is not a thorn on them, roast them on an iron trident and offer them to You with devotion. Lakṣmaṇa will draw from Lake Pampā pleasantly

cooling water scented with the aroma of lotus flowers. Then He will place that water which sparkles like silver or crystal in a lotus leaf for You to drink, while You repeatedly feed the fish among the clumps of lotuses in Lake Pampā.

“You will see large forest boars of great beauty which live in mountain caves and which come down to the shore of the lake when they are thirsty, bellowing like bulls. While strolling at sunset, You will give up all grief upon seeing the shoreline, flower-decked trees and cool waters of Lake Pampā. There the tilaka and naktamālaka trees are blossoming and the lilies and lotuses are in full bloom. No man has ever picked those flowers, and they never fade or wither. The peaceful disciples of the sage Mataṅga used to live there. When they were under the burden of bringing forest products for their spiritual master, their bodily sweat began falling on the ground. By dint of their austerities, those drops of sweat became flowers. Because these flowers sprung from their drops of sweat, they never perish. Their long-lived and ascetic maid-servant named Śabarī can still be found there, O descendant of Kakutstha. Only after seeing You who are equal to God, honored by the whole world and firmly situated in righteousness, will she be able to go to the spiritual world.

“Thereafter You will see the hidden and unequalled hermitage of the sage Mataṅga on the western bank of Lake Pampā. Even though there are many kinds of elephants in that forest, they cannot enter that hermitage because of the sage’s spiritual power. Therefore the forest became known as Mataṅgavana. You will enjoy Yourself fully in that forest which is like a heavenly paradise and which resemble’s Indra’s Nandana Garden. On the eastern side of Lake Pampā is Rṣyamūka Mountain. Its trees are always in bloom and it is very difficult to ascend. It is guarded on all sides by young elephants and is magnanimous. It was created in the past by Lord Brahmā. A person who lies his head down on that mountain and dreams of attaining some treasure actually achieves it upon waking. If one who acts sinfully climbs this mountain, when he falls asleep he will be grabbed by rākṣasas and beaten. The loud trumpeting of young elephants playing in Lake Pampā can also be heard on that mountain. Wet with streams of blood from fighting with each other, big elephants the color of dark storm clouds roam about in a herd separate from other elephants. After drinking the clean and cool

water that is refreshing to touch and fragrant-smelling, they again enter the jungle.

“Seeing the bears and tigers, which have a soft brilliance like sapphires, and ruru deer that have never been defeated by humans, You will abandon all grief. O Rāma, on that mountain there is a big cave whose entrance is hidden by a boulder, and is therefore very difficult to enter. On the eastern side of the entrance is a large pond of cool water. That charming pond abounds in edible fruits and roots and is visited by many deer. There lives Sugrīva along with four other monkeys. Sometimes they stay on the peak of the mountain.”

After instructing Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, Kabandha, who was wearing a flower garland and was as brilliant as the sun, continued to shine in the sky. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, who were about to leave, said to Kabandha, who remained fixed in the sky: “You may go.” Kabandha replied to Them: “Go accomplish Your purpose.” Kabandha took leave of the two princes and departed. Having regained his original form and having instructed Rāma about how to reach Lake Pampā, Kabandha, who was covered with glory and looked just like the sun, gazed at Lord Rāma and said: “Establish friendship with Sugrīva.”

RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA MEET ŚABARĪ

Following the path to Lake Pampā that was shown by Kabandha, the two princes proceeded westward. As They continued on Their way to meet Sugrīva, They saw many trees bearing fruits as sweet as honey that were growing on the mountains. Spending the night on a mountain top, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa arrived at the western shore of Lake Pampā. After reaching that lake crowded with lotuses, there on the western bank They saw the hermitage of the ascetic woman, Śabarī. When They arrived at the hermitage surrounded on all sides by trees, They looked around and saw Śabarī. Seeing that the two had arrived, the perfected ascetic Śabarī stood up with joined palms. She touched the feet of Lord Rāma and the wise Lakṣmaṇa, and then offered them water for washing the feet and mouth as per scriptural rules. Then Rāma said to the female ascetic who was diligently observing vows: “Have you overcome all impediments to perfection in your practices? Have you made advancement in your practice of austerities? O woman rich in asceticism, have you managed to control your anger and your eating? Have you achieved the purpose of your vows and is your mind fully satisfied? Has your service to your spiritual master born fruit, O lady of charming speech?”

Standing before Lord Rāma when questioned in that way, the aged Śabarī, who was not only perfected, but respected by other perfected souls, spoke to Rāma as follows: “Now I have achieved the perfection of my austerities by seeing You. Today my asceticism is bearing fruit and my preceptors have been honored. O Rāma, after worshipping You, the best of the gods, my birth is now fulfilled and I shall ascend to the spiritual world. O descendant of the Raghu Dynasty, being purified by Your glance, I shall ascend to the world of immortality by Your mercy.

“When You first arrived at Mount Citrakūṭa, the sages whom I served ascended to heaven in aerial vehicles of unequalled brilliance. Those highly fortunate sages dedicated to righteousness told me: ‘Lord Rāma will

come to this holy hermitage of yours. You should receive Him and Lakṣmaṇa as guests. After seeing Him, you will ascend to that excellent and imperishable world.’ I have therefore gathered a variety of forest products for You, O tiger among men, from the bank of Lake Pampā.”

The righteous soul Rāma then said to Śabarī, who was always fixed in transcendental knowledge: “If you think it all right, I would like to see the glory of those great souls who are your preceptors of whom I heard about from the demon Kabandha.”

Upon hearing this request sprung from Rāma’s lips, Śabarī showed the two brothers around that great jungle, saying: “Just see this famous forest known as Mataṅgavana, which is as dark as a mass of clouds and frequented by herds of deer and flocks of birds. Here those spiritual masters of mine perfected themselves by performing sacrifices and worshiping the holy places with mantras. This is the altar called *pratyakṣa-sthālī* where those sages whom I respected offered flowers with hands shaking due to exhaustion from old age. See how this altar maintains its unequaled effulgence because of the influence of those sages’ austerities and is illuminating everything around it. See the seven oceans which were brought to this place by their mediation. This they did because they were unable to go to those oceans due to weakness from fasting. Their clothes, which were made from tree bark and in which they had bathed, are hanging on these trees in this area and have still not dried. These garlands of flowers and blue water lilies, which they made for worshiping God, have not wilted at all. You have seen the whole forest and heard whatever was worth hearing. Now, with Your permission, I simply want to leave my body. I wish to gain the association of those perfected sages to whom this hermitage belongs and whom I served.”

Upon hearing this pious request, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa experienced unparalleled pleasure and said, “Wonderful!” Rāma then said to Śabarī, who was dedicated to observing vows: “I have been honored by you with devotion. Now go as you wish.” Hearing this, the Śabarī wanted to give up her old body, which had matted hair tied up in a bun on top of her head, and which was dressed in tree bark cloth and the skin of a black antelope. With Rāma’s permission, she threw herself into a blazing fire. Blazing like fire, she

rose up to the heavenly world. She was adorned with shimmering ornaments and a shining flower garland. Her body was anointed with heavenly sandalwood paste and dressed with celestial clothes. She looked very beautiful there, glowing like a streak of lightning in a cloud. By mental concentration, Śabarī attained that holy place where the great sages whom she honored were enjoying.

RĀMA AND LAKṢMAṆA GO TO THE SHORE OF LAKE PAMPĀ

When Śabarī, being illuminated by her own effulgence, had ascended to the spiritual world, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa contemplated what had happened.

Pondering the spiritual power of those great souls, Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa, who possessed mental concentration and who was His attendant: “My dear brother, I have seen the perfected sages’ hermitage, which has many wonders and which is frequented on all sides by tigers, deer and many birds. I have bathed in all seven oceans by bathing here, and have offered libations of water to My forefathers in accordance with scriptural rules. All that was inauspicious has been eliminated and auspiciousness will now prevail.

Therefore, O Lakṣmaṇa, My mind is very pleased and awareness of good fortune will well up in My heart. As such, come! Let Us proceed to that Lake Pampā, which is pleasing to see. Not far from there is Rśyamūka Mountain, on which resides the righteous soul Sugrīva, the son of the sun god. He lives there with four other monkeys out of fear of Vālī. And I am in a hurry to meet Sugrīva, the best of monkeys, for My endeavor to find Sītā depends on him.” As Rāma was speaking in this way, Lakṣmaṇa remarked: “Let us go there quickly. My mind is also impatient to meet Sugrīva.”

Thereafter Rāma left the hermitage with Lakṣmaṇa and arrived on the shore of Lake Pampā. Rāma then saw that holy lake to which magnanimous people resorted. Lake Pampā’s shore was crowded with numerous trees and vines and the lake itself was full of good drinking water. In it were clusters of fragrant red and white lotuses and masses of white and blue water lilies. Thus the lake was splattered with many colors like a brightly colored blanket. When They reached the lake which was filled with water flowing from far away, They bathed in a pool called Matāṅgasarasa that was on the shoreline. It was covered with red lotus flowers and white water lilies and highly fragrant white lotuses. It was surrounded by a grove of blossoming mango trees and resounded with the cries of peacocks. There

were also the following trees: tilaka, bījapūra, dhava, śukladruma, blooming karavīra, flowering punnāga, bhaṇḍīra, nicula, aśoka, saptaparnā, ketaka, atimukta and many other kinds of trees, and vines of mālātī and jasmin. Being surrounded with big trees in full bloom, the pool looked like a nicely decorated woman. That great forest resounded with the cries of many different birds, such as koyaṣṭikas, arjunakas, śatapratras, and kīrakas. Arriving there calm and composed, the two princes beheld the lake and forest with many birds. On the shore They saw many different trees and pools.

Burning with the desire to find Sītā, They approached that excellent lake. There were groves of trees in bloom, such as sāla and campaka, which were covered with swarms of honey bees, and therefore had an unparalleled beauty. The lake's water was crystal clear and its bottom was covered with soft sand. Seeing how Lake Pampā was crowded with fragrant lotuses, Lord Rāma spoke the following words to Lakṣmaṇa: "On the bank of this lake is the holy mountain covered with flowering trees known as Rśyamūka, which was mentioned to Us earlier. The valiant monkey widely known as Sugrīva, the son of Ṛkṣarāja, lives on this mountain. Go to the monkey chieftain Sugrīva." Then Rāma additionally said: "Although I was already dejected due to the loss of My kingdom, because of My mental attachment to Sītā, how will I be able to live without Her?"

After speaking these words to Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma, who was tormented by the pangs of love and stricken with grief, entered lovely Lake Pampā, which was full of lotus flowers. Then He gradually proceeded along the pathway, gazing at Lake Pampā and its beautiful forests with many different kinds of birds.