

Then she approached Lakṣmaṇa with the same request. He too refused to oblige her. Then she saw Sītā there and decided to shatter her married life and also to make a present of her to Rāvaṇa. She also thought that if Sītā were got rid of she would have Rāma for husband. Maddened by such thoughts she rushed into the āśrama. But, Lakṣmaṇa drove her out. Then, carrying Lakṣmaṇa with her she rose into the sky and he cut away both her ears, breasts and nose. Thus disfigured she resumed her form of Rākṣasi. She flew away in the sky roaring loudly.

16) *Khara killed.* Having heard about the disfigurement of Śūrpaṅkhā Khara sent fourteen Rākṣasas to Rāma's āśrama. Lakṣmaṇa killed them very easily. Next, Khara, his brothers Dūṣaṇa and Triśiras with fourteen thousand Rākṣasa soldiers came to fight Rāma. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa killed them also. This saddened Śūrpaṅkhā very much and she reported the entire affair to Rāvaṇa at Laṅkā. She told him that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were very courageous warriors and he was not to enter into direct fighting with them, but was to abduct Sītā whose loss would cause Rāma's death. She also assured Rāvaṇa that if Rāma died, Lakṣmaṇa would himself end his life.

17) *Sītā abducted.* Next day a spotted deer was found playing near the āśrama. Sītā desired to have the deer and Śrī Rāma, after asking his brother to take care of Sītā, followed the deer, which enticed him to a great distance in the forest. At last, finding it difficult to catch the deer alive, Rāma shot an arrow at it. Hit by the arrow the deer transformed itself into a gigantic Rākṣasa and fell down dead crying. "Oh! Sītā O! Lakṣmaṇa, a Rākṣasa is killing me. Come and save me."

The Rākṣasa, who thus fell a prey to Rāma's arrow was really Mārīca, uncle of Rāvaṇa. Mārīca had gone in the form of a deer to Rāma's āśrama at the instance of his nephew to cheat Rāma. Sītā heard the false cry of Mārīca and asked Lakṣmaṇa to hurry up to the spot for Rāma's protection. Lakṣmaṇa at first did not want to leave Sītā there alone and go after Rāma. But, when she used hard and cruel words against him Lakṣmaṇa quitted the āśrama and went into the forest. When Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were thus absent at the āśrama an old Sannyāsin came for alms at the courtyard. Sītā, who came out to offer alms was forcibly carried away by Rāvaṇa (the sannyāsin was Rāvaṇa in disguise) in his puṣpaka aerial chariot to Laṅkā. On the way Jaṭāyu saw Rāvaṇa and put up a fight with him to get Sītā released. But, Jaṭāyu had to fall down wounded by the sword of Rāvaṇa and he lay there awaiting Rāma's arrival.

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa returned to the āśrama only to find Sītā missing. While they advanced some distance lamenting over the loss of Sītā they saw Jaṭāyu lying in the forest, his wings cut, but happy in expectation of salvation and repeating the name of Rāma. Jaṭāyu gave Rāma all details about Sītā and then gave up his body and ascended to Vaikuṇṭha.

18) *Salvation to Kabandha.* Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa moved towards the south in quest of Sītā. An asura woman called Ayomukhi, sister of Śūrapadma tried to entice Lakṣmaṇa, who went alone to a pool to fetch water. When Lakṣmaṇa resisted and kept away from her allurements, she tried to carry him away into the sky.

But, he drove her away disfigured. When the brothers continued their search for Sītā they were caught in the arms stretched out in semi-circular form. It was a Rākṣasa called Kabandha, and they cut away one arm each. At once the fierce Kabandha (headless body) form disappeared and a Gandharva youth appeared in his place. After offering mokṣa to Kabandha Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa continued their search for Sītā. (See under Kabandha).

19) *Salvation to Śabarī.* Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa reached Śabaryāśrama and were duly received by the female hermit Śabarī. She presented them with fruits. Not only that, she personally tasted each fruit for its quality and then gave the best to the guests. Rāma was so very pleased with her pure devotion that he offered her salvation. (For details see under Śabarī).

20) *Rāma-Sugrīva alliance.* Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa bathed in the Pampā river and thus refreshed they travelled upto the height of Mount R̥ṣyamūka where Sugrīva lived with Hanūmān as his Prime Minister. Sugrīva, who saw Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa coming, deputed Hanūmān to find out whether they were friends or foes. Hanūmān, in the guise of a brahmin boy talked with them, who related their story from the abduction of Sītā. Having understood the matters Hanūmān resumed his actual form and carried Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa on his shoulders into the presence of Sugrīva.

Sugrīva related to Rāma the story of his expulsion from Kiṣkindhā by Bālī, his elder brother. Sugrīva wanted a powerful ally to recapture the country. Similarly Śrī Rāma too wanted a powerful ally to regain Sītā. So both the parties entered into an alliance, Rāma undertaking to kill Bālī and restore his kingdom and his wife to Sugrīva and Sugrīva undertaking to search for and find out Sītā for Rāma.

Though the above pact was made, Sugrīva was doubtful about Rāma's capacity to honour his part of the contract, and Rāma, knowing this suspicion of Sugrīva, wanted to dispel it. The mountain-like body of Dundubhi, the Rākṣasa killed by Bālī, lay there in a big heap of bones and at the instance of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa threw it into the distant southern sea with the big toe of his left foot. Sugrīva was wonder-struck at this feat of Lakṣmaṇa and praised him. Yet Sugrīva was not quite cured of his doubt and Rāma wanted to further convince him of their prowess.

There were seven big trees there known as Saptasālas. Bālī used to wrestle with the trees due to his overflowing vitality and power. (See under Saptasāla). Śrī Rāma went near the trees and suddenly fixed an arrow on his bow-string and shot it by drawing the bow, with the big toe of his right foot pressed against a rock. The arrow cut down the seven trees at one and the same time and then automatically returned to its quiver. Sugrīva was taken aback by this marvellous show of power.

21) *Exhibition of ornaments.* They came again to R̥ṣyamūkācala and Sugrīva placed before Rāma a bundle of ornaments and said that it was dropped down by a weeping woman from an aerial chariot, which had, a few days back, passed above the mountain. Rāma recognised them as Sītā's ornaments, shed tears and sat there motionless for some time. At last Sugrīva and Lakṣmaṇa consoled him and he handed over the bundle of ornaments to Lakṣmaṇa.