

## Chapter 5. Success in the Search

The rains stopped. The autumn season dawned on the world. The earth shone resplendently green. Grass sprouted everywhere, and soon the earth decked itself with a many-coloured floral dress. Greed weakens when gladness grows; so too, the waters evaporated when the star Agastya appeared in the sky. The mind is rendered pure and pellucid when desire and delusion disappear; so too, the rivers were rendered clear and clean.

Rama told Lakshmana, “Brother! It’s time to warn Sugriva now.” Lakshmana paid heed to the command and asked Hanuman, who was a daily visitor to the hermitage, to remind Sugriva of the promised task. Hanuman was most earnest and anxious to fulfil Rama’s orders, and he warned Sugriva immediately and effectively.

Sugriva called the leaders of the monkey hordes together and initiated the arrangements. He gave everyone the determination and courage needed for executing the task assigned. Urged by the resolution that the mission must succeed, he sent them to all four quarters. He entrusted the overall leadership to Hanuman himself. Led by Hanuman, the entire assembly of monkeys shouted “Hurrah (*jai*)!” to Sugriva and to Rama, the Lord. Dancing and jumping in glee, the monkeys hurried on their different paths, inspired by Hanuman and the holiness of the mission.

Sushena and Mandava went north. They searched the Gandhamadana mountain range, the Sumeru Peak, the Arjuna Mountain, and the Nilagiri Ranges, and the caves therein until at last they reached the shore of the Northern Sea.

Hanuman went east with a group of followers. The group were equally earnest in their search. They cared little for sleep or food and were ready to offer their very lives at Rama’s feet. They wanted only one thing: success in their task of serving Rama. From the least to the highest, everyone had the same loyalty and spirit of dedication. Reciting the name, “Rama, Rama, Rama,” they peeped into every nook and corner, every peak and promontory, every cave and cove, every valley and riverbank, for they could penetrate into regions and places where people could not enter.

### A clue from Swayamprabha

One day, they reached the shore of a broad lake. They espied a woman deeply engaged in austerities. They prostrated before her from a distance. She opened her eyes. Seeing their exhausted condition said, “Monkeys! You appear very tired and hungry. Refresh yourselves with these fruits,” and she supplied plenty of food.

When they sat around her, she heard from them the mission on which they were moving about. She said that she was going to the holy place where Rama was.

“Listen to my story,” she said. “My name is Swayamprabha. I am the daughter of a celestial god (*gandharva*). I have a heavenly nymph (*apsara*) friend called Hema. While I was engaged in austerities, Brahma appeared before me and asked me what I needed. He assured me that he would grant me my wish. Then I replied, ‘I wish to see God as man, moving on earth!’ He said, ‘Be here alone. In due course, a number of mighty monkeys will arrive here and halt at your request. From them, you can know of Rama, who is God come in human form. Later, you can look on Rama himself.’

“Ah! That boon is being realised. The first sign and the second are already fulfilled. The first is your arrival.

The second is your account of Rama's story and His place of residence. I am as happy as if I had already attained the third, namely, the sight (*darshan*) of Rama."

The woman was immersed in unbounded ecstasy and delight and shedding tears of joy. The monkeys were also deeply moved and shed tears of delight. Meanwhile, the woman began introspecting with eyes closed. She broke the silence with the announcement, "Monkeys! On a sea-shore, in a beautiful city, at the centre of a charming garden, alone, all by herself, Sita is bewailing her fate. You will see her, without doubt. Be assured of this. Proceed in confidence and with courage."

### **Sampathi knows where Sita is**

One day during their search, the monkeys sank in gloom and sighed, "Alas! Only two days remain of the time allotted to us by master Sugriva. And we haven't found Sita!" Angada and the rest lamented their fate and were lost in despair. Tears rolled down their cheeks. They had come to the shore of the sea and were sad that they couldn't cross it to continue the search. So they sat in groups on the sands, pining in disappointment.

Jambavan, the old leader, counseled Angada in many ways. "Why do you grieve? We put forward our best efforts; we searched all places without the least dereliction of duty; we haven't wasted a single moment in idling. We haven't worried even about food and drink. We have been engaged ceaselessly in searching for Sita. Our master and ruler, Sugriva, might not be a witness to our activities, but believe me, Rama is witnessing them! Rama won't be a party to the infliction of any punishment on us. We have no reason to fear Sugriva's anger. Since this is His task, let's carry it out with His name on our tongue and His form in our minds."

While Jambavan was thus consoling and comforting Angada, a huge, aged bird hopped to the shore, to perform the last rites for its dead brother and to offer water sanctified by sesame grains in the holy sea. The monkeys gathered around the new arrival, wondering whether it was a demon (*rakshasa*) who had transformed himself into that form.

The bird, however, started speaking first. "Monkeys! My name is Sampathi. Jatayu and I are brothers. Eagles as we are, we both raced toward the sun in competition years ago. My brother could not bear the scorching heat as we neared the Sun and flew back. But a sense of pride induced me to continue the flight. As I went stage by stage, my wings were burned and fell off. I dropped like a stone from the depth of the sky.

"A sage named Chandramas happened to pass by and see my plight. He sat by my side and taught me a good deal of wisdom through his lessons. Listening to his precepts, my pride was destroyed. He told me, 'O King of birds! Listen to my words. In the *Thretha* era (*yuga*) that is coming, God Narayana is incarnating in human form; His consort will be carried by Ravana to an unknown place. An army of monkeys (*vanaras*) will trace her whereabouts, and your life will be rendered holy and worthwhile on seeing those emissaries of God engaged in their holy mission. You can assure yourself that it has been rendered so because at that very moment, your wings will grow in strength. Your duty will be to give them information regarding the place where Sita is kept.'

"Today I came here by the sea to perform the last rites of my brother, Jatayu. Seeing you, I recollected the sage's words, uttered so long ago. Why? Look! As soon as I recollected, his words came true!" At this, the monkeys exclaimed excitedly, "Sampathi! Put aside the story of your life. Our term is fast ending. Sita's whereabouts, quickly! Tell us what you know, what happened to her!"

Sampathi lost no time in elaboration. "O monkeys (*vanaras*)! One day, when I was afflicted with uncontrol-

lable hunger, I called my son, Suparna, to my side and told him, ‘Son! Fly quick. Get me some food. I am old; I am hungry; my wings have fallen off.’ Seeing my plight, he flew into the forest but didn’t return. My anxiety for him suppressed the pangs of hunger. At last, he appeared with some venison. My hunger made me forget the restraint natural to a wise being; I was enraged at the inordinate delay and decided to pronounce a curse on my son.

“Fearing this, my son caught hold of my feet in supplication. ‘Father! I didn’t waste a single moment while away. Please listen to my prayer. Pardon me for the delay, which was unavoidable.’ He placed the venison before me, and when my hunger was appeased by eating it, I asked him to relate to me the cause for the delay.

“He said, ‘When I was flying into the forest, a person with twenty hands and ten heads was hurrying along. With him was a woman of indescribable beauty. She was weeping and wailing most pitifully. She was crying out just one name, Rama! Rama! No other word emerged from her mouth. I knew it was a monster, so I attacked him. My futile attempts to stop his progress and save that woman caused this delay.’

“When I heard these words, I felt terribly ashamed that I had lost my wings and had grown old. I was overcome with grief. I guessed he must be a demon (*rakshasa*), so I asked my son in which direction the ten-headed monster was going. He replied that he had taken the southern direction.

“Immediately, I exclaimed, ‘Alas! That monster is the Ravana that the sage had mentioned; that woman is the divine mother, Sita! There can be no doubt. That monster has stolen her like a dog, a fox, and he is running away with his prey.’ I gnashed my teeth in anger. What else could I do?”

Thus, Sampathi explained what had happened and what he knew of the incident. “I have been awaiting the arrival of the army of monkeys (*vanaras*), as the sage had informed me. Every day I hoped that they would pass my way. Today, my prayer is answered. My life has been sanctified.”

Then, Sampathi announced, “O monkeys! The city of Lanka is situated on the Triple-Peak Hill by the shore of the sea. The city has many charming gardens and parks. There, Sita is in the *ashoka*-tree forest (*ashokavana*), moaning her fate. She is awaiting your arrival. So, go further south.”

Angada asked the bird how it came to know that she was in the forest of *ashoka* trees, grieving over her misfortune. Sampathi answered that the vision of the eagle covers an area of about 400 *yojanas* and that, had he not been handicapped by age, he would certainly have helped them even more in their mission.

The problem now was crossing the ocean!

Sampathi said, “O monkeys! You can achieve success in the task given to you by Rama if one among you has the strength and skill to leap a distance of about 100 *yojanas*.” As he was saying this, the wings of Sampathi grew and flapped a little. He could hop a slight distance, and within a short time, he could actually fly. The sage’s words had proved true. Sampathi was wonder-struck at regaining his wings.

He said, “O brave monkey heroes! To fulfil Rama’s command, you have carried out the search with great efficiency and enthusiasm, without allowing even hunger and thirst to hinder your efforts. You have evinced steady faith and deep devotion and have risked your lives often while engaged in the search. It is Rama who has been conferring endurance and strength on you; He is having His task executed by you.

“Your duty now is to contemplate on Him and pray to Him with a full heart. When that is done, you can see Sita without fail and give satisfaction to Rama. You can, with His grace, leap over the ocean with ease, see Sita, and bring joy to Rama’s heart. The joy that we cause in the heart of God is the only worthwhile achievement —

what can we say of lives that do not offer this gift to God? Only those who live on the lines laid down by God and who by their acts carry out His wish are valid; the rest are barren and futile; they only consume precious food and move about, burdening the earth.” With these words, Sampathi took wing and flew away.

The monkeys were struck with pleasant surprise at the sudden recovery of his powers. They said among themselves that repetition of Rama’s name can achieve the impossible —as the saying goes, the dumb can speak and the lame can climb hills. Sampathi could get back his wings and fly into the sky only through the grace won by recital of the name. By means of Sampathi’s words, the monkeys could see and know things correctly.

### **Who will cross the ocean?**

The monkey leaders started estimating their strength and leaping capacity. Jambavan addressed them thus, “Friends! Old age has overwhelmed me; my skill and strength have declined. Somehow, prodded by the joy of executing Rama’s commands and encouraged by His blessings, I have been able to stay on till now and move about with you. I was in full possession of my strength and intelligence, and in the best adult stage of life, when the Lord incarnated as Vamana and demonstrated His three-steps (*Trivikrama*) form.”

Hearing this, the monkeys gathered around the crown prince of their kingdom, Angada. “O Prince,” they pleaded, “Search for some feasible means. Decide who among us has to attempt to leap over the ocean.” Then, Angada called together a full session of all the monkeys and announced that he would like to know the capacity of each for this enterprise.

Vikata rose and said, “I can leap over at most 30 *yojanas* (1300 km.)”

Nila declared, “Prince! I can manage to leap 40 *yojanas* at one jump, but I regret I wouldn’t be able to exceed the distance by even a finger breadth.”

Durdhara rose next and said that he could easily jump a distance of 50 *yojanas*.

Nala came forward and, with a great flourishing of hands, said he could jump 60 *yojanas*.

While such competitive boasting and parading of skills were going on, Angada declared, “Listen, I can leap over this ocean once, but I doubt that I would have enough strength left to leap back. One has not only to reach the other shore; one has to fight with the demons (*rakshasas*) there, if need arises. That would make me still weaker, and I would have no strength left. I’m afraid my resources wouldn’t last that long, for all three operations.”

When Angada spoke in these depressing terms, the leading monkey elders rose as one and pleaded, “Prince! You are the heir-apparent to our kingdom. The discussion whether you are capable of taking up this mission is irrelevant. It is not right and proper that you should cross over to the land of demons (*rakshasas*); it is against the canons of royalty. You have to assign the task to some servant of the kingdom. When you have millions of servants eager to do your bidding, it’s not right for you to consider undertaking this task.”

Jambavan suggested charging someone else with the errand, and Angada looked around, saw Hanuman, and said, “O son of the wind-god, you are Rama’s dedicated servant. Your devotion is indeed deep. You were blessed first among all of us with the sight (*darshan*) of Rama. Through your intelligence, diplomacy, and moral pressure you established the friendship between Rama and our ruler, Sugriva. Now, you are silent as we discuss the difficulties of executing Rama’s mission. I find it difficult to understand the meaning of this silence.”

Angada extolled Hanuman still further. “There is no adventure that you cannot tackle successfully. You are

strong, you are highly intelligent. You are endowed with all the virtues. Evaluate your own skills, capacities, and excellences, and rise.”

### **Hanuman jumps the ocean**

Angada’s words filled Hanuman with his erstwhile strength. He rose with a sudden gesture and said, “O monkeys! Wait here, all of you, for my return. Wandering all these days through hills and dales, jungles and plains, you have had no time to rest. Eat the fruits and tubers available in this area and station yourselves here. This instant, I shall leap over the ocean, enter Lanka, see Sita, and come back. My only work is to carry out Rama’s command. How else can we make our lives worthwhile than by earning His grace?” He raised his folded palms in salutation before the vast gathering of monkeys.

He took leave of Angada, the crown prince. The monkey hordes were raising in unison the exultant cry, “Victory (*jai*) Rama.” Hanuman pictured Rama’s glorious form in his mind, and, with one leap into the sky, he was off over the sea. Unable to withstand the tremendous airflow caused by his leap and flight, trees on the hills were uprooted and carried along. The impact of his leap was so great that the peak on which he stood sank into the nether regions.

Seeing him fly across, the sea thought within itself, “Hanuman is Rama’s servant; he is going on Rama’s mission. Ah, how lucky he is! He has the strength and intelligence necessary to win victory in that mission. He is indeed the foremost among Rama’s devotees.” The sea was boisterous with joy at the sight of Hanuman going over and across.

The Mainaka Peak, which was submerged in the sea, rose over the waters, for he wished to serve the person who was engaged in the service of the Lord. He said, “O son of the wind god! It will be exhausting for you to cover the full distance in one leap; please rest for a while on my head and confer on me the good fortune of having a share in the service you are devoted to.”

Hanuman heard Mainaka’s prayer but didn’t halt. He touched the peak as a token of halting and sped on. He bowed to the hospitable peak in gratitude. “Mainaka! I am going on Rama’s errand; till I fulfil it, I can have no thought of rest or even food and drink. It is not proper for me to stay awhile on the way.” A little further on, a serpent-demon Surasa and the ogress Simhika obstructed his passage, but Hanuman overcame them all and reached the Lanka shore.

### **Hanuman gets past Lankini**

There, splendid in the sunlight, he found many gardens and parks, as well as pleasure centres, which made Hanuman forget where he was. He was amazed at the variety of multicoloured birds that fluttered to and fro in clusters within the parks. Hanuman climbed onto a charming mound that was near by and thought within himself, “This success is not due to my skill or strength; it is due entirely to Rama’s grace and blessings.”

Seeing the uniquely grand houses, the attractive gardens, the long, wide streets, etc., in Lanka, Hanuman was moved with wonder and doubt —doubt whether it was a replica of heaven itself. Wherever one cast an eye, one saw well-built demon soldiers parading the streets. Demon women, famed for their skill and powers to assume whatever form they wanted, were indulging in licentious sports. Divine women, female serpents (*nagas*), female celestial musicians (*gandharvas*), and human damsels enslaved by Ravana were pining and wailing in the palaces,

awaiting the day of release. Hanuman concluded that it would not be wise to move about in his native form among the vast crowds that filled the streets. He assumed a subtle imperceptible form and entered the city.

At the very entrance gate of Lanka was a demoness named Lankini. She was placed there to prevent any foreigner, whatever their intentions, from entering the city. She saw the strange figure of Hanuman venturing to enter and accosted him in a threatening manner. “Who goes there? Where do you come from? Who are you? We have never before seen such a creature in this region. You could not have come from outside the bounds of Lanka, for Lanka is surrounded by the sea. Ah! did you come across the sea? How can you avoid me and enter the city? Halt! Stop where you are!”

Hanuman paid no attention to her vapourings; he moved forward, dragging his tail behind him as if he had not heard her threats.

Lankini became even more furious and ferocious. She roared in anger, “O, ill-fated fool! Don’t my words fall on your ears?” Hanuman brushed aside her protests and questions; he walked toward the gate, smiling. Lankini shouted, “Ugly beast! Whoever goes against my orders will be eaten up. Remember. I will chew your bones in seconds. Be warned.” She rushed forward to catch the tiny monkey that Hanuman had become when he sought to enter Lanka city.

When she came right in front of him, Hanuman tightened his little fist and hit her a mighty blow. She rolled unconscious on the ground. Blood flowed in streams from her mouth. She recovered after a while and rushed madly forward to catch hold of Hanuman. But when Hanuman dealt another blow, she could not bear the impact; she fell and could not rise again.

She managed to sit up after great struggle, and with folded palms, she supplicated, “O person of wonderful form! Long ago, when Brahma, the first of the Trinity, was turning away from Ravana, after granting him many boons, he faced him all of a sudden and said, ‘The day your guardian of the gate is fatally hurt by a blow from a monkey’s hand, know that your downfall begins; your powers can no longer help you. Be warned by that incident that death is drawing near. That monkey will enter Lanka at God’s command, to fulfill His mission. His arrival heralds the destruction of the demons; be conscious of this.’ You are the messenger indicated. How fortunate that my body was sanctified by contact with your sacred hand! Ah! How soft and thrilling was the blow you gave me.” Saying thus, she fondled the spot where Hanuman had hit her.

### **Hanuman meets Vibhishana**

Meanwhile, paying no heed to her words, unmoved by praise and unconcerned with blame, Hanuman entered Lanka, repeating “Rama, Rama” with every breath. Still, a thought tormented him. Who would give him a clue about where Sita was? How would he know Sita when he saw her? He adopted a subtle form to escape notice and moved from one treetop to another. He roamed in the bazaars and among groups of demons (*rakshasas*), unknown to anyone.

“Suddenly, his eyes fell upon a building that seemed to be a temple of Hari (i.e. Vishnu; Rama was an incarnation of Vishnu). It had a garden of basil (*tulsi*) plants all around it. Over the entrance door, the name Hari was beautifully carved. The house was undoubtedly a temple of God Vishnu. Hanuman was surprised! “How did the name Hari come to be over this door?” he wondered, “Surely, this is a holy spot.”

His curiosity was awakened. He jumped onto the roof of that place and peeped through the window to find

out what was happening. Just then, a person was stretching his limbs prior to rising from bed, pronouncing the name Hari. Hanuman was extremely delighted. He was also emboldened when he saw that even in Lanka there were people reciting the name Hari. His courage grew, and his apprehension about finding Sita waned.

“The man of this house appears to be devout and good. Maybe he can tell me where Sita is. He might be persuaded to befriend me, since we are both loyal to the self-same form of God.” With this idea, Hanuman changed himself into a priest of the *brahmin* caste and entered the house.

For a moment Vibhishana, the owner of the house, had some doubt regarding the stranger, but he decided that, whoever he was, he surely must be honoured since he was a *brahmin*. So he came forward and prostrated before Hanuman. “Master! What is your native place? Where do you come from? How could you avoid being noticed and harassed by the demons (*rakshasas*) in the streets?” He described to his guest the horrors indulged in by the demons and extolled the audacity and fearlessness of Hanuman.

Hanuman replied, “I am a servant of Hari. My name is Hanuman. I came because Rama sent me.” He spoke of Rama’s virtues and excellences in some detail.

While he was describing Rama, tears rolled down Vibhishana’s cheeks. “O, what a happy day! How great is my fortune! As soon as I rose from bed, I could hear these glorious words, which bring peace and joy,” thought Vibhishana to himself.

Hanuman interpreted these incidents as Rama’s grace. He was wonderstruck that in Lanka, the land of fear, there could be one such person soaked in Hari. He asked him, “Sir, how do you live without fear in this vile atmosphere?”

Vibhishana replied, “It is due to the grace of God. For however long He resolves that we should live, we have to live that long; there is no escape. He is the master of the objective world, so His law cannot be overruled or changed by any one. Doesn’t the tongue move about incessantly in the cavity of the mouth, where teeth with sharp edges surround it? Who helps it to escape being bitten? So too, I am living here. Enough about me; tell me on what task you have been sent here.”

Hanuman realised that Vibhishana was a good man and that association with such men would without doubt yield good results. Before answering Vibhishana’s queries, he repeated the name Rama many times in joyful gratitude and prayed for permission to disclose his mission to the pious pure-minded Vibhishana. He felt it would not be correct to hide things from him.

As a preliminary, he asked, “Sir, what is your name? What are you doing in this Lanka?” Touched by Hanuman’s humility and good manners, Vibhishana replied, “Sir, I am an unfortunate person, Ravana’s brother. My name is Vibhishana. I am in a pathetic fix, for I am unable to recite the name of Hari to my heart’s content.”

Hearing this, Hanuman felt he had his answer. He performed one high skip in joy and said, “I am a messenger of Rama. I have come in search of Sita.

In an instant, Vibhishana fell at Hanuman’s feet and asked, “Sir, where is my Rama now? I have been yearning for a long time to see Him, but I lack the virtues that alone can entitle me to that gift. My tribe is the demonic (*rakshasa*) tribe. Can I have the chance to see Him? I haven’t engaged myself in spiritual exercises (*sadhana*); I have no freedom here to practise austerities and rites. I have earned no right to the good fortune. Will I be blessed by Rama?”

Listening to his appeal, Hanuman's heart melted in sympathy. He consoled Vibhishana a great deal. "Vibhishana! Rama heeds only the heart; He will not be affected by family affiliations, religious affinities, or attainments in spiritual exercises. He is pleased best by feelings and their purity. He will bless you for the loftiness of your ideals and the cleanliness of your daily life. He will grant you the sight (*darshan*) you are yearning for, so don't grieve.

"Why, you can take me as the best proof of what I am saying about His compassion and grace. I am a monkey, and waywardness is the hallmark of my tribe. The word 'monkey' has become a byword for a prankish, playful, petty mind. I am not versed at all in the scriptures. As for asceticism, I have no idea what it means. I have not repeated God's name according to prescribed rules; nor have I gone on pilgrimages seeking holy rivers! Why then has Rama blessed me? Because He heeds only the love that animates and the feelings that activate people. In your case also, He will pay attention only to the purity of feelings. Be confident; don't doubt."

Relieved by these words, Vibhishana gave Hanuman the details of how Sita was brought to Lanka.

Hanuman refused to eat or drink, since he had resolved to refrain from both until he saw Sita and communicated Rama's message to her. He was eager to renew the search without delay. But Vibhishana advised him to proceed cautiously and slowly and inform himself of the strength and weakness of Ravana's empire before he left. He acquainted Hanuman with these points in some detail. Thereafter, he let him leave on his errand.

Hanuman was so delighted to learn that Sita was in Lanka that he forgot to ask where she was! He entered many mansions looking for her. He saw bevy of women, fallen on their beds, intoxicated by drink and dance and floored by the banalities of luxury. Keeping in mind the characteristics and excellences of Sita, which Rama had described to him, he observed closely every woman in those houses, but he couldn't find Sita. In near despair, he jumped on a peak of a hill and thought over the situation deeply, for a long time. "How can I go back to Rama without completing my mission—meeting Sita and consoling her? Far better to drown in the sea. Alas. My life is wasted. Fie upon it," he said to himself.

That very instant, he saw a beautiful garden, trim and green, shining in the distance. Coming down the peak, he realised that since the garden was in a valley surrounded by tall mansions, he couldn't discover it from the ground. Not knowing what to do next, he hied fast to Vibhishana's house and discovered him immersed in reciting Rama's name.

Seeing Hanuman, Vibhishana rose and approached him in a friendly and pleasing manner. "Hanuman! Did you see Sita?" Hanuman expressed his disappointment, but Vibhishana gave him the information. "Hanuman! In this city there is a garden named *Ashokavana*. There, in the midst of terrible and mighty demons (*rakshasas*), Sita is kept. My wife and daughter are with her, doing service." He also told him how to reach the garden and the spot.

### **Sita at last!**

Hanuman couldn't stay a moment longer, and he reached the garden in a trice. Those who saw him began shouting and accosting him, for his figure was strange and peculiar to them. Noticing this, Hanuman felt that his figure was making him too prominent and public, so he assumed a diminutive size. Jumping unnoticed from branch to branch, hiding himself behind clusters of leaves, he reached the *ashokavana*.

There he saw a woman sitting under a tree, weak and worn through want of food and sleep. The fierce demons sitting guard around her were threatening her, to change her will and break her determination. Meanwhile, a



grand cavalcade neared the place, heralded by the beating of drums and blowing of trumpets. Behind them Hanuman could see a royal personage, bejeweled and robed in magnificent style. Hundreds of maidens followed him, carrying plates full of jewels, sweet and fragrant presents, and soft silks. Ensnaring himself within the green shade of leaves, Hanuman watched the scene from the top of a nearby tree.

It was Ravana, evidently, for he pleaded before Sita and prayed to her that she might offer her love to him. He tried to extract a promise by threats of cruel punishment. Hanuman heard him exhort those around him to inflict pain and injury on her.

That frail feeble woman didn't raise her eyes toward Ravana even once during all the tirade. She only said, "Fool! Vile vicious fellow! Rama alone has rights over me: no one other than Rama has any. I shall reduce this body to ashes in the flames of sorrow at separation from Him. I shall never stray from my resolve. Believe in this and beware!"

Hanuman heard these emphatic words and realised that the woman was Sita and no other. His mind gained peace and calmness when he knew this. Very soon, Ravana, stung by disappointment and angry at the discomfiture, became even more violent in speech. He gave her a month's respite to think over and accede. The cavalcade and the maids with the plates accompanied him out of the garden.

When they had all left, Sita raised her head toward the heavens and sighed: "Rama! Has not compassion yet entered your heart? Why have you condemned me to this torture? When am I to be freed from this?" And she burst into weeping.

### **Thrijata's dream**

A demon (*rakshasa*) named Thrijata, one of Sita's warders, was deeply attached to the lotus feet of Rama. She was a pious devotee, who had both worldly wisdom and spiritual experience. She spoke to her companions keeping watch over Sita, "Comrades! Last night, I had a dream, which I must relate to you. But first let us serve and revere Sita and win her grace. For, listen to the story that was revealed in my dream.

"A monkey entered Lanka, slaughtered the demons and set the city on fire! Ravana had no clothes on. He was riding a donkey, of all animals, and moving south very fast. His head was shaven close, and his arms were severed from his body. Vibhishana was crowned emperor of Lanka. Throughout the length and breadth of the land, Rama's name was resounding. Then Rama sent for Sita.

"Sisters of the demon (*rakshasa*) clan! Take note. I never get dreams. I haven't seen any before. So if I dream at all, know it will certainly come true; it will happen just as in the dream. Moreover, the realisation of this dream won't take long; things must happen just as I dreamed within four or five days."

The demon women were amazed at the revelation; they prostrated at Sita's feet and silently resumed their routine duties.

Seeing Thrijata's behaviour, Sita addressed her, "Thrijata! Rama Himself must have sent you here to be one of this group around me. Truly, it is because there are a few women like you in Lanka that unfortunate people like me are able to sustain our chastity and virtue. Or else, what would be the fate of women like me? You heard, didn't you, the expressions Ravana used just now? He has given me a month's respite. If Rama doesn't come within a month, I, or rather this body, will be cut to pieces, and it will be plucked and eaten by vultures and crows. Being

the consort of Rama, I can never tolerate that horrid fate for this body. Tell me some plan through which I can get rid of this body sooner.”

Hanuman heard these words from the branch of the tree and was overcome by sorrow at Sita’s despair.

Thrijata fell at Sita’s feet and assured her, “Mother! Don’t lose hope! Rama is no ordinary being. His might and majesty are unequalled. It will ever be so. He will certainly save you. He will arrive very soon and hold your hand in his. Don’t lose courage.” She consoled her by loving words and left for home.

### **Sita and Hanuman converse**

Availing himself of this chance, Hanuman jumped from his perch to a lower branch. He dropped the ring given to him by Rama in front of Sita; it fell, shining like a flame of purest ray. And he kept on repeating “Rama! Rama” in ecstatic bliss.

When she saw the ring, Sita was astonished. “Is this true, or am I dreaming? Can it be true? How can this golden ring worn on the golden finger of my Lord be found in Lanka? Is this demon (*rakshasa*) magic or mere hallucination? No. I shouldn’t hesitate to take it in my hand any longer, when I recognise it as my Lord’s. It would be a sin to refrain from handling it.” She took the ring and placed it on her eyes in reverence. Tears of gratitude flowed from her eyes. “Rama! Are you granting me your sight (*darshan*), the joy of your presence through this ring?”

She raised her head and saw a small monkey sitting on a branch of the tree, continuously reciting “Rama, Rama,” in deep devotion. In a flash, she remembered the incidents in Thrijata’s dream as related by her.

“Ah! Good days seem to be fast approaching. For ten long months, I have not heard Rama’s name pronounced in this Lanka. Today, I am able to see a living being reciting the holy name. I also received the dearly loved ring of my Lord,” she exulted. She couldn’t keep her joyful excitement down.

Sita, who had not talked to a stranger for so long, looked at the monkey form and addressed it, “O monkey! Who are you? Where does this ring come from?” She could not put full trust in the monkey, for she had been deceived for months by tricks of impersonation. She interrogated the monkey in various ways in order to verify his credentials. Off and on, she would ask the monkey about Rama’s welfare, and at the very thought of His being alone, in the forest, tears would flow profusely from her eyes. Sita swung alternately between joy and grief.

Hanuman watched her plight; he could not keep away from her the bond of love and loyalty that was holding him to Rama. He related the dynastic story of Rama and His exploits, as well as his own story until he met Rama. While listening, she felt as happy as when Rama stood before her; she could picture Rama standing beside her at Ayodhya and in the forest retreats. She felt so thrilled that she forgot herself and her condition.

Soon, she recovered consciousness and knew where she was. She said, “O monkey! I am glad you told me all this; but let me ask a question. How were you able to enter this heavily guarded city, in spite of your being only a weak little monkey? How could you escape being caught by these demons (*rakshasas*) and succeed in spotting this place and coming to me?”

Hanuman replied, “Mother! What skill and strength do I have? I am Rama’s servant, His slave. He makes me do everything He wants or likes. Without Him, I cannot survive even a moment. I am a doll in His hands. I play as He pulls the strings; I have no will of my own.”

Then, Hanuman elaborated on the glory of Rama and manifested his devotion and dedication in the most impressive manner. It was most thrilling to hear his words.

Rama had told Hanuman for communication to Sita some incidents that no one else knew. He had said, “Sita may not believe your words; she may doubt your genuineness. Then, you can remind her of these events, which are known only to her and me.”

So, Hanuman began relating those special incidents. “Mother Sita! He asked me to tell you of the attempts made by the wicked crow to cause injury to you and of His attempt to save you and to kill that demon.”

Sita wept aloud, saying, “Hanuman! Why is Rama, who was so kind to me then, delaying to release me from this torture? Rama is the ocean of mercy. Yes, but why has he become so hardhearted at my fate? No! No! I am wrong. Rama is the embodiment of compassion. He has to play a role that involves all this apparent hardheartedness, that is all. Hanuman! You are no ordinary individual! For Rama won’t associate so closely with ordinary individuals. Nor will He send His ring with inferior persons. How fortunate you are to be His messenger! Show me once your full stature and form.”

Then, Hanuman landed on the ground and stood before Sita with palms folded in adoration. When Sita saw him growing into a huge and terror-inducing size, she half suspected it to be some demonic trick. She closed her eyes and turned aside!

Realising her fear and the suspicion that was its basis, Hanuman said, “Mother! I am neither Ravana nor one of his devilish demons (*rakshasas*). I am the faithful servant of Rama, with the pure sacred body of unequalled splendour. He is the very breath of my existence, believe me. I am speaking the truth. Guessing that you may not have faith in my being His authentic messenger, He took this golden ring from His finger and placed it in my hands, to be given to you.

“With me came Jambavan, Nila, Angada, and thousands of others of extraordinary heroism. But only I was able to cross the ocean, through Rama’s grace. The others are all on the other shore. We were able to hear from Jatau and Sabari the story of your having been brought here by this villainous demon king. When we got the news three days ago from Sampathi confirming your being here, we felt as happy as when seeing you before our eyes. Rama and Lakshmana are awaiting my return with the good tidings. If you permit me, I will get back immediately and give them news about your welfare.”

Sita pleaded, “Hanuman! I don’t know whether you will return, or when. Please stay for a day more and delight me by telling me about Rama and Lakshmana.” But since the demonesses were gathering to carry out their separate assignments, Hanuman resumed his miniature size and hopped onto a tree branch.

Sita sat under the tree, ruminating on all that Hanuman had told her. She derived delight while doing so, and she cast her eyes showering benediction on Hanuman sitting on the branch above her head. That day, she had no thirst or hunger; she did not touch the fruits and drinks that the women-guards brought her.

Her pathetic condition hurt the kind heart of Hanuman. She appeared to him as the very picture of misery. Hanuman heard the harsh and sharp-pointed words used by the women-guards, and he gnashed his teeth in anger, for he could not deal with them as he wished to —only Sita could give him orders what to do.

After some time, Sarama, Vibhishana’s wife, and her daughter Thrijata came to the tree and fell at the feet of Sita, who was sitting disconsolate thereunder. They asked about her health. Since they were partial toward her,

Sita spoke to them about how the dream of Thrijata had come true and how a monkey had actually entered Lanka in accordance with it.

Sarama and Thrijata showed extreme enthusiasm and excitement when they heard the account of what had happened, and they plied Sita with questions, in their eagerness to know all details. Sita showed them the monkey perched on the branch and the ring it had brought. They both pressed the ring on their eyes in reverent adoration.

### **Sita refuses to go back with Hanuman**

Hanuman was watching for an opportunity to see Sita alone, and very soon he got it. He jumped to the ground and whispered to Sita, “Mother! Don’t be anxious and grief-stricken. Sit on my back, and I will transport you in a trice to Rama and Lakshmana.” Hanuman pleaded in many ways for her to accept this plan.

Sita replied, “Hanuman! I am indeed very glad to hear you speak thus. I am sunk and struggling in the sorrow of separation; your sweet words give me solace like a boat on a stormy sea. But don’t you know that I will never contact a person other than my Lord? How then can I sit on your back? Consider that.”

Her sharp repartee hit Hanuman in the heart and exposed his pettiness and pride for having suggested a dishonourable step. But he soon recovered. “Mother!” he said, “Am I not your son? What is wrong when the son carries the mother on his back? What evil consequence can that have?” He supported his idea with various pleadings and points.

In reply, Sita declared, “Hanuman! Of course, for me and for you, the feelings of mother and son are real, but imagine what the world will think of it. We have to consider that aspect also, don’t we? We must so live that we are ideals for others. Our acts should not draw the ridicule, contempt, or condemnation of others; no one should point a finger of scorn at us. And, above all, we must derive self-satisfaction from our acts. When I know I can’t derive that satisfaction I will never attempt such acts. Even if my life departs, I don’t need or crave for another’s assistance.

“Moreover, my Rama has to destroy this vile demon who tortures me. He has to discharge the responsibility; no one else can. He must come himself into Lanka, kill Ravana, and lead this Sita back, holding her in His hand—that is the sign of the true hero that He is. That is the sign of genuine valour.

Look at Ravana. He came like a thief in a false form and stole me from my Lord. But Rama is the embodiment of righteousness; he observes the norms of right behaviour. He honours the spoken word. If news spread that Rama sent a monkey who took away Sita without Ravana’s knowledge, that would be dishonouring him. Getting out of here in the way you suggest would surely be treason. We shouldn’t resort to mean stratagems. We should guard Rama’s fair name as our very breath. His fame is the deity we adore in our hearts. We have to preserve it unimpaired by thought, word and deed. This is why your proposal has not given me satisfaction.”

Hanuman admired her untarnishable virtue, her steadfast adoration of her Lord, and the loftiness of the ideals she maintained. He extolled her in his mind and recollected her words, in order to draw inspiration from them. He said, “Mother! Pardon me. Since I saw with my own eyes the tortures you are undergoing and the pangs of separation that Rama is suffering, I entertained this idea to take you as quickly as possible to His lotus feet. Pardon me if it was wrong.” He fell at her feet again and again, in great remorse.

At this, Sita questioned him many times on the condition of Rama and Lakshmana and how they were faring

in the forest.

“Why worry about men?”, he told her. They can bear any burden or travail. They can bear separation from women with fortitude. Women suffer most, for it is terror for the wives to live apart from their husbands.”

“Mother! Rama and Lakshmana are keeping well, of course, but don’t compare them with ordinary males. It is not fair. Alas! Every moment Rama spends in thoughts of you and of separation from you, so He is not paying heed to either thirst or hunger. He doesn’t eat or drink, unless pressed lovingly by Lakshmana. I don’t remember a single occasion on which Rama drank a gulp of water on His own initiative. Don’t be under the impression that they have forgotten you or are neglecting you.

“Lakshmana spends his days watching over Rama as the lids guard the eye; he is the breath of the breath of Rama. He is overcome by the agony of separation from you and of witnessing the anguish of his brother. He has become a rock, unaffected by any feeling other than concern for Rama. He is the source of courage and sustenance that is unfailing and full. He has not slept these ten months, nor has he taken food.”

When Hanuman was describing the pathetic condition of the brothers, Sita acted amazed at the love and affection that Rama had toward her. Again and again, she said, “Yes. You describe only the misery of men; what do you know, how can you gauge the sorrows of women?” She pretended not to believe all that Hanuman told her! She watched Hanuman and appreciated his wisdom and powers; she recalled the story of how Rama and Hanuman had met and came to be bound in love and loyalty, and she derived great joy and content therefrom. At last, she got firm faith in Hanuman and his mission.

Again and again Hanuman pleaded, “Mother! Why this feeling of separateness? Why spend months in agony and pain? Please sit on my back and I shall take you in a trice to Rama.”

Sita noted Hanuman’s anxiousness to win his point in spite of her arguments, moral and spiritual, legal and worldly. She decided to stop further conversation on this score by a sharp repartee. “Hanuman! Are you or are you not one who obeys strictly Rama’s commands?”

Hanuman replied, “Yes. I would rather give up my life than go against Rama’s commands or disobey His orders.” He banged his chest with his fist in order to lend emphasis to his declaration.

“Well. Consider this. Did Rama command you to find me and bring him information about where I am after seeing me, or did He ask you to bring me with you?”

Hanuman was rendered dumb by this question. He couldn’t continue his pleadings. He said, “Mother! I didn’t think so deeply into the consequences of my proposal. I ask pardon again.” And he never broached the matter again.