

at the palace gate. That lion is a Yakṣa who was cursed by Kubera. If any one defeats him, he would be liberated from his curse. By defeating that lion, you will get a divine sword. With that you can defeat anyone." As soon as he heard this story, Śrīdatta rushed towards the lion. In the fight that followed, the lion was defeated and it was suddenly transformed into the old Yakṣa. Pleased with the hero who was instrumental in lifting his curse, he gave Śrīdatta a sword called "Mṛgānkaka" and then disappeared. Vidyutprabhā entered the palace, accompanied by her sisters and Śrīdatta. She gave a ring to Śrīdatta which had the power to destroy the effects of poison. She fell in love with him. She asked him to take a bath in the tank close by after giving the sword to her, and undertook to kill any crocodile which might attack him. Śrīdatta, keeping the sword in his own hand, stepped into the water and sank into it. But he rose up in the river Gaṅgā into which he had jumped earlier. He reached the bank of the river and went in search of his companions. On the way, he met with Niṣṭhūraka. In the course of their talk, Niṣṭhūraka informed Śrīdatta that, Vallabhaśakti passed away and Vikramaśakti was then ruling over the country. The new king had killed Kālanemi and was on the look-out for murdering Śrīdatta. Both of them resumed their journey and when they reached Ujjayinī, they met with the rest of their friends. On their way, a woman joined their party. She had lost her way while going to the land of Mālava. Śrīdatta and Niṣṭhūraka walked in the company of that woman and at last they arrived at a deserted city. They spent the night in that city. During the night when Śrīdatta happened to wake up, he saw to his horror, that the woman had killed his friend Niṣṭhūraka and was eating his flesh. Śrīdatta at once drew his sword and caught hold of her hair and was about to cut off her head when she was transformed into a Rākṣasa woman. She prayed to him not to kill her and told him her story. She had become a Rākṣasa woman by a curse. Long ago Viśvāmitra did tapas to obtain Kubera's place. At that time Kubera sent her to break Viśvāmitra's tapas. Since she failed in her attempts to attract him by her charms, she tried to subdue him by assuming the form of a terrible monster. The sage thereupon cursed her to become a Rākṣasa woman with that figure. He declared that the curse would be lifted when Śrīdatta grasped her hair. She added that she had been killing and eating the inhabitants of that city for a long time and that explained why the city had become deserted. Now that she was liberated from the curse, she asked Śrīdatta what boon he wished to have.

He replied that he only wanted his friend to be restored to life. After reviving Niṣṭhūraka, she disappeared. Early next morning they reached Ujjayinī. There, they met their old friends, Bāhuśālī and others. Śrīdatta described to them his experiences after sinking in the Gaṅgā.

Later, once when Śrīdatta went to a festival, he happened to meet Mṛgānkavatī, daughter of a King named Śrībimbaki. They fell in love with each other. When she left the place, Śrīdatta felt very much depressed. Bāhuśālī and others also knew about it. They offered to take him to Mṛgānkavatī. But just then she fell down unconscious, bitten by a snake. Śrīdatta soon restored her with the help of the magic ring which Vidyutprabhā

had given him earlier. After that he returned with his friends to Bāhuśālī's house, leaving behind the ring with Mṛgānkavatī. The King who was deeply grateful for the cure of his daughter sent plenty of wealth and gold to Śrīdatta. But Śrīdatta gave all of them to Bāhuśālī's father. He was always doting on Mṛgānkavatī and was much pained at his separation from her. At this stage, the princess's favourite maid came to him on the pretext of returning the magic ring and informed him that Mṛgānkavatī was also pining for him and was even prepared to die for his sake. Śrīdatta sent her back with a secret message of love and cheer. After that in consultation with his friends he made a plan to take the princess secretly to Mathurāpurī. On the next day, Bāhuśālī with three of his friends left for Mathurā pretending to go there for trade. He made all arrangements on the way for the secret conveyance of the princess. That night, Śrīdatta sent a woman and her daughter to the palace after making them senseless with heavy drink and arranged for their sleeping there. As directed by Śrīdatta, Bhāvanika set the palace on fire and slipped out of the building with the princess. Śrīdatta sent them at once to Mathurāpurī. The woman and her daughter who were burnt alive in the palace were supposed to be the maid and the princess. Śrīdatta set out to Mathurā to meet Mṛgānkavatī. On the way he saw several evil omens. On arrival at Vindhyaavana, he saw his friends lying helpless, after having been severely beaten up by unknown enemies. They informed him that a stranger leading a powerful army overpowered them and galloped away on horseback, taking the princess with him.

Śrīdatta immediately started in pursuit of the unknown enemy. Shortly after, he caught sight of the army led by a Kṣatriya prince who was taking Mṛgānkavatī on horseback with him. After a fierce fight, Śrīdatta rescued the princess from the youth, captured his horse and rode on it with her towards his friends. When they had gone a short distance, the horse which had been wounded in the battle, fell dead on the way. At that time he went in search of water to quench their thirst, leaving Mṛgānkavatī at the spot. By the time he returned with water, the sun had set. So he lost his way and wandered about in the forest till day-break when he reached the place where he had left Mṛgānkavatī. But she was not seen anywhere there. To get a better view of the neighbourhood in the hope of finding her, he climbed to the top of a tree near by, after placing his sword on the ground. Just then a hunter named Śabara came that way and took up Śrīdatta's sword. Śrīdatta saw this, but he got down from the tree and instead of attacking him, merely asked him whether he knew about the whereabouts of Mṛgānkavatī. To this Śabara said that he thought that she had reached his cottage and asked Śrīdatta to accompany his followers to the cottage. He also offered to go with him and promised to return his sword after reaching there.

Śrīdatta reached the cottage with them. Being utterly exhausted, he fell into a deep slumber. When he woke up he found that his legs were chained together. While he was lying thus, a woman named Mocanikā approached him and said:—"Why did you come here to court death? Śabara has now gone out on some business. As soon as he returns he will offer you as a sacrifice to Bhadrakālī. It is for that purpose that he has brought