

As an Indra among monarchs, his royal tasks complete,  
removes his crown, gently sets it down, and then disappears  
into his chamber, so too the lord of day had doffed his  
crown jewel, the darkness-dispelling sun, on that summit  
of the setting-hill. Night accompanied by her stars arrived  
as did that soothing fount of nectar, Night's beloved moon.

Many a hundred bonfires blazed around the battlefield.

There, where charioteer Saumitri lay upon the ground,  
Vaidehī's husband fell speechless. His tears flowed uncontrolled,  
10 mingling with his brother's blood, and wet the earth like a spring  
which trickles down a mountainside, dissolving ocher dust,  
then seeps out on the ground below. The Raghu troops seemed stunned  
by grief—Vibhīṣaṇa, wild in war, and Kumuda, and  
Aṅgada, Hanumān, heroes Nala and Nīla, and  
Śarabha, Sumālī, Subāhu, a lion among  
warriors, and Sugrīva—all condoled their lordship's sorrow.

Once their lord regained consciousness, he, grief-stricken, chided—  
"When I renounced the kingdom and went to live in exile  
in the forest, Lakṣmaṇa, as night set in, O expert  
20 archer, bow in hand, you, at the door of our hut would stand  
alert to guard me. Yet here today in the Rākṣasas'  
enclave—this day, this very city of the Rākṣasas! —  
I, among foes, here founder in these perilous waters.

Still then, O great-armed one, you forsake me seeking respite  
upon the ground? Who will rescue me today, please tell me?  
Stand up, brave one! Since when do you not heed your brother's words?  
But if by some ill luck of mine—I who am unlucky  
always—if you have indeed abandoned me, then tell me  
honestly, you who are to me much more than life, for I  
30 must hear. What misdeed is hapless Jānakī at fault for,  
in your opinion? Day and night she weeps as she, confined  
by Rākṣasa, thinks of Lakṣmaṇa, her husband's brother.  
How did you forget—Brother, how could you ever forget  
this day the one who like a mother always cared for you  
so warmly. O pinnacle of Raghu's clan, she, a clan  
wife, shall she remain incarcerated by Paulastya?  
Is it right that you should rest before you first destroy in  
combat such a wicked thief—you who are invincible  
in battle, bold as omnivorous fire? Arise, my fierce-  
40 armed one, victory pennant of the Raghu clan! Minus  
you I am helpless, a charioteer whose chariot  
is missing wheels. With you supine on this bed, O hero,  
Hanumān is powerless, a bow without its bowstring.  
Aṅgada wails pitifully; friend Sugrīva, noble-  
minded, is heartsick; good charioteer Vibhīṣaṇa,  
Karbūra supreme, he too mourns; a host of heroes grieve.

Get up, console these eyes, my brother, by the gaze of yours.

"If, however, you have tired of this awful war, then,

O archer, let us go back to our forest home. Sītā's

50 rescue, fondest one, is not to be—that luckless woman.

It is not for us to vanquish Rākṣasas. But if you

do not accompany me, how shall I, Lakṣmaṇa, show

my face upon the Sarayū's far shore where Sumitrā,

your mother who so loves her son, laments? What shall I say

when she asks me, 'Where, O Rāmabhadra, is the object

of my love, your little brother?' How shall I answer to

your wife, Ūrmilā, and to the people of the city?

Stand up, dear child. Why do you turn a deaf ear today toward

this plea your brother makes, for love of whom you quit the realm

60 with its amenities and took to the forest? Out of

sympathy, you always used to cry whenever you would

see these eyes of mine moist with tears. Tenderly you dabbed those

teary rivulets. Now I am drenched with water from my

eyes, yet you, who are to me much more than life, will you not

so much as glance my way? Lakṣmaṇa, does such behavior

ever suit you, Brother (you who are renowned throughout the

world as one devoted to his brother!), you who are my

everlasting joy. All my life I held firm to *dharma*

and worshipped the gods—and is it this the gods have given

70 in return? O Night, compassion-filled, you who nightly make  
the flowers, withered by the summer's heat, succulent with  
drops of dew, revive this blossom. You who are a fount of  
nectar, god of nectar rays, pour down your life-bestowing  
juices, save Lakṣmaṇa—save beggar Rāghava, kind one."

The foe of Rākṣasas, forlorn, wailed upon the field of  
battle cradling his dearest younger brother. All about  
the warrior throng howled with sadness, just as howls a stand of  
stately trees at midnight when winds blow deep in the forest.

At her home upon Kailāsa, the mountain's daughter<sup>1</sup> was  
80 empathizing with the saddened Raghu lad. From the lap  
of Dhūrjati to his lotus feet the droplets of her  
tears trickled, like dew upon the hundred-petalled lotus  
at dawn. Her lordship queried, "For what reason, my pretty,  
are you distressed today, tell me?" "What is there which you do  
not already know, my god?" replied the goddess Gaurī,  
"Out of grief for Lakṣmaṇa, Rāmacandra mourns wildly  
in golden Laṅkā. Listen! My heart is stirred by Rāma's  
sorrow. Who in the world, O lord of the universe, will  
ever worship this slave of yours again? You embarrassed  
90 me greatly today, lord. You have plunged my reputation  
into waters of disrepute. This servant of yours falls  
at your feet, at fault for disturbing your meditation,

O Indra of austerities—just for that, I guess, you  
 punish me so? Ill-fated was the moment Indra came  
 to me! ill-fated, when Maithili's spouse did my *pūjā*!"

The great goddess sobbed silently, her feelings hurt. Smiling,  
 Śambhu answered, "Why so glum, daughter of the Indra of  
 mountains, over this mere trifling matter? Send that warrior,  
 Indra among Rāghavas, to Kṛtānta's city with  
 100 Māyā; by my favor, charioteer Dāśarathi,  
 in corporeal form, shall gain access to spirit world.  
 His father, king Dāśaratha, will inform him by what  
 means the brother might regain his life. Stay your gloom my  
 moon-faced one. Present to Māyā, prettiest, my trident.  
 There in Yama's land of darkness it will shine a fiery  
 pillar and illuminate that realm. The spirits there will  
 honor it, as loyal subjects do the regal scepter."

At her Mount Kailāsa home, Durgā called to mind Māyā.  
 At once that sorceress appeared and, with hands together,  
 110 bowed before Ambikā. In soft tones Pārvatī spoke, "Go  
 to Laṅkā, beguiler of the universe. Maithili's  
 mate laments, beside himself from grief for Saumitri. Speak  
 to him with sweet words and guide him to the land of spirits.  
 His father, Dāśaratha, will advise him by what means  
 high-minded Saumitri might gain again his life, along

with all the soldiers slain in this destructive war. Hold this  
trident of Trisūli's in your lotus hand, chaste lady.

This best of weapons, like a pillar made of fire, will glow,  
illuminating Yama's land of darkness." With a bow

120 to Umā, Māyā set off. The shadows in the Milky  
Way drifted far away, as though outshone by the brilliance  
of her beauty. Those myriad stars smiled—like gems inlaid  
on a ray of sun. In her wake she left across the face  
of the sky a trace of light as that beauty, like a ship  
in ocean waters, headed for Laṅkā. Soon that goddess  
landed where the sullen jewel of Raghu's clan stood among  
his army. Golden Laṅkā filled with heavenly fragrance.

At Rāghava's ear, Mother whispered, "Wipe away your streams  
of tears, charioteer Dāśarathi, your beloved

130 brother shall revive. Bathe in the sea's sacred waters, then  
come with me at once to Yama's quarters. Nobel one, you  
will enter bodily the land of spirits by virtue  
of Śiva's favor. Your father Daśaratha will make  
known how well-marked Lakṣmaṇa will again live. O fierce-armed  
one, come now. I shall excavate a tunnel. Fearlessly,  
fine charioteer, proceed through it. I shall go ahead  
of you to show the way. Tell everyone, Sugrīva and  
all commanders, that they should stand guard over Lakṣmaṇa."

Astounded, Rāghavendra alerted all his generals  
 140 to take heed. Then that noble one set out for the seashore  
 —to that place of holy pilgrimage. Once he had bathed his  
 body in these sacred currents, the most fortunate one  
 propitiated all the gods, his ancestors and such,  
 giving offerings of drinking water, then with dispatch  
 proceeded to the entrance of his tent, alone. Now the  
 jewel of men saw his quarters bright by godly power.  
 Hands cupped in supplication, that charioteer performed  
 worship with flowers meant especially for the goddess.  
 Adorning his imposing figure in fine warrior garb,  
 150 that lord of warriors bravely ventured into the tunnel  
 —for what does he with whom the gods find favor have to fear?

On went that best of Rāghavas, as goes a traveler  
 down a path through a darkened forest when at night the beams  
 the nectar-rayed moon, smiling, casts penetrate the woodland.  
 And on ahead proceeded goddess Māyā in silence.

In a while that best of Raghus, startled, heard waves crashing,  
 as though a thousand oceans swelled, bellowing angrily.  
 He gazed with trepidation not far away upon a  
 monstrous city, ever cloaked in night. The Vaitaraṇī,  
 160 like a moat, flowed by resounding thunderously! In fits and  
 spurts waves bubbled hotly, just as milk in heated vessels

surges upward, bursting into puffs of vapor, panicked  
 by the fire's power. The gem of day does not show itself  
 in splendor in that sky, nor does the moon, nor stars. Thick clouds,  
 packing wind and spewing forth great balls of fire, roam throughout  
 deserted pathways, howling wildly, like Pinākī at  
 Pralaya when, inflamed, he sets his arrows to his bow!

170 Taken aback, the Raghu lord gazed upon a wondrous  
 bridge that spanned the river—sometimes fiery, sometimes wrapped in  
 dense smoke, beautiful sometimes, as though it were built of gold.  
 Beings by the millions were ever running toward that bridge  
 —some wailing, agonized, while others acted jubilant.

Vaidehī's husband asked, "Tell me, kind woman, why the bridge  
 repeatedly assumes a different guise? And why do those  
 countless beings (like moths who spot a flame) dash to the bridge?"

180 The goddess Māyā answered, "It is a bridge of many  
 natures and can at will change its form, O Sītā's husband.  
 To sinners it is veiled in smoke from its fiery power;  
 when virtuous beings come along, it turns most pleasant  
 and beautiful, like a golden path to heaven. Over  
 there, those countless souls you see, gem of men, left their bodies  
 in the mortal world; all are on their journey to the land  
 of spirits to enjoy, or suffer, as it were, the fruits  
 of deeds on earth. They who followed *dharma*'s ways cross the bridge



to the northern, western, and eastern gates. Sinners, in great  
 misery, forever swim the river. Yama's henchmen  
 harass them upon the sandy shore, while in the water,  
 their sin-filled hearts burn as if in scalding oil. Come along  
 with me. You soon shall see what men's eyes have not seen before."

190           With deliberate steps the best of Raghus walked behind;  
 ahead, like a golden lamp, the sorceress illumined  
 that horrific land. Beside the bridge, Rāma, seized with fear,  
 spied a monstrous figure, a messenger of Yama, with  
 punishing rod in hand. Thundering, that emissary  
 of Kṛtānta interrogated, "Who are you? By what  
 power, O brash one, did you come into this land, alive  
 and with your body whole? Speak at once, or I shall crush you  
 here and now by a blow from this staff!" Goddess Māyā smiled,  
 and to that messenger Mother vaunted Śiva's trident.

200           Head bowed, that henchman spoke to the chaste lady, "Can it be  
 within my power, faithful one, to halt your progress? See,  
 the bridge turns gold with joy, as does the sky when greeting Dawn."

They both crossed the Vaitaraṇī river. On ahead that  
 Raghu sovereign saw a city's iron gates—wheel-shaped rings  
 of flames spun constantly, spewing sparks everywhere. On  
 the face of that imposing gate, the jewel of men saw  
 written there in fiery letters, "By this path sinners go

to suffer constant sorrow in the realm of sorrows — you  
who enter, give up all hope as you step inside this land!"

210           Before the gates that charioteer caught sight of Fever,  
gaunt and frail. Now his skinny body quaked with cold, now burned  
in horrid heat, like the waters' sovereign, from the forces  
of Vaḍabā's fire. Bile and phlegm and gas — they all attacked  
him, causing loss of consciousness. Beside this malady  
sat Gluttony, gross of belly, regurgitating half-  
digested food, foul thing, scooping up more tasty morsels  
with both hands, wolfing them down. Near him Inebriation  
grinned, his eyelids heavy from a drunken stupor — sometimes  
dancing, sometimes singing, sometimes quarreling, crying sometimes,  
220 but always the senseless fool, always a destroyer of  
one's senses. Next to him was nasty Prurience, body  
putrid as a corpse, yet that sinner lusted after sex  
— his heart ever sizzled in the flames of carnal craving.  
There beside him sat Consumption spitting blood and hacking,  
coughing night and day. Asthma wheezed and gasped, in gripping pain.  
Cholera, his eyes lackluster, waves of blood from mouth and  
anus spewed like streams of purest water — in the form of  
thirst, this foe attacks repeatedly. There stood that frightful  
messenger of Yama, spasmodic Tetanus by name,  
230 who grips one's weakened body cruelly, like a tiger, who,

when preying on some forest creature, stalks now, then pounces  
 on its quarry, clawing it exuberantly. Nearby,  
 beside that sickness, sat Insanity—violent at  
 times, inflamed like fire when offered an oblation of ghee,  
 at other times completely catatonic—now decked out  
 in odd apparel, then again, stark naked, like Kālī,  
 Hara's darling, on the field of battle—sometimes frenzied,  
 singing songs and clapping gaily—sometimes sobbing—sometimes  
 with a broad grin on her twisted lips—at still other times  
 240 slitting her own throat with a sharp knife, swallowing poison,  
 drowning in a well, hanging by the neck—sometimes, for shame!  
 strutting coyly, lewdly, a most lascivious woman  
 seducing lustful men—and without discriminating  
 between feces, food, and urine, she, alas, would sometimes  
 mix them all together and eat heartily—at times she  
 is bound in chains, other times she seems composed, just like a  
 river without current, in the absence of any breeze!  
 Who can describe all the other maladies that were there?

Rāghava eyed a charioteer in battle on a  
 250 fire-colored chariot (his clothes drenched in blood, a sharp-edged  
 sword in his hand). At the chariot's prow stood Wrath, attired  
 in driver's garb. A necklace made of human heads around  
 his throat, a pile of corpses heaped before him. He noticed

Murder, fearsome falchion in hand. His arms upraised, alas,  
 always in the act of slaying. And from a tree limb, rope  
 around his neck, swung Suicide noiselessly, tongue lolling,  
 fright-filled eyes wide open. Speaking sweetly to the Indra  
 among Rāghavas, goddess Māyā said, "All these ghastly  
 messengers of Śamana you see in sundry guises,

260 Raghu hero, they roam the surface of the earth without  
 rest, just as a hunter through dense forests stalks his deer. Step  
 into Kṛtānta's city, spouse of Sītā. Today I  
 shall show you under what conditions souls reside within  
 this land of souls. Here we have the southern gate; eighty-four  
 hell-pits lie within this sector. Now come along at once."

The courageous spouse of Sītā stepped into Kṛtānta's  
 city, ah me, just like springtime, king of seasons, into  
 a charred forest, or like elixir into a lifeless  
 body. Darkness filled the city, while all around arose  
 270 wails of agony; both the land and waters shook nonstop  
 from quakes; a massive line of roiling clouds in angry fits  
 spit deadly fire; fetid winds wafted, as though a thousand  
 corpses were then being cremated at a burning ground.

After a while, that best of Raghus saw in front of him  
 a huge lake—deadly fire rolled like water in crashing waves.  
 In it swam a million beings, twisting, writhing, screaming

with agony! "Alas, heartless Fortune, did you create  
 us in these many forms for this? Ah, intolerable!  
 Why did we not succumb to searing gastric juices in  
 280 our mothers' womb? Where are you, gem of day? And you, O lord  
 of night, moon with the nectar-rays? Will our eyes again be  
 soothed by gazing on you two again, O gods? Where are our  
 sons, our wives, our relatives? Where, ah, are those possessions  
 for which we labored constantly by many schemes—for which  
 we did our shady deeds, while indifferent to *dharma*?"

In this manner, the sinful souls lamented time and time  
 again wallowing within that lake. From the void came the  
 answer, booming savagely, a message born of that void,  
 "Why, O hapless ones, do you cavil in vain at your fate?

290 Here you suffer all the consequences of your actions.  
 For what reason did you hoodwink *dharma* with such evil  
 actions? The rule of Fate is known as fair throughout the world."

When the heavenly message ceased, Yama's monstrous henchmen  
 bashed in heads with staves. Worms gnawed away. Diamond-taloned flesh-  
 consuming raptors swooped down upon those wispy figures,  
 ripping out intestines, screeching hideously. And the  
 lands around were ringing with the screams of tortured sinners.

Sadly, Māyā spoke to Rāghava, "This fiery lake is  
 known as Raurava, listen, gem of Raghus. Base-minded

300 ones who steal another's riches remain here forever.  
 If those who judge are partial to injustice, they too end  
 up in this lake, as do all other beings guilty of  
 such flagrant sins. Here the fires never are extinguished, the  
 worms never cease gnawing. I tell you, this is no common  
 conflagration which consumes these spirits in this loathsome  
 hell, best of Raghus. Fate's rage, assuming fire's form, burns here  
 perpetually. Come along, charioteer, I shall  
 show you Kumbhīpāka, the hell in which Yama's henchmen  
 fry sinners in hot oil. Listen, O hero, not far off  
 310 that is their sound of crying. By my *māyā* power I  
 have blocked your nostrils, otherwise you could not stand it here,  
 O charioteer, best of Raghus. But let us go to  
 where in dark pits those who have committed suicide moan  
 pitiably, ever captive." With hands cupped together,  
 that sovereign among men spoke, "Please forgive this slave of yours,  
 Kṣemaṅkarī. I shall perish here and now from others'  
 sorrows, if I see more suffering of this sort. Mother,  
 who could willingly be born into this world knowing these  
 are the consequences? Man is helpless—can he, Mother,  
 320 ward off the sorcery of sin?" Answered Māyā, "There is  
 not a venom in this world, O great archer, for which there  
 is no antidote. But if one shuns that medicine, then

who can save him? The noble one who fights sin through his deeds  
 is always looked upon with sympathy by gods—Dharma  
 shields that one in armor quite impregnable. Were you to  
 witness all these pits of punishment, O charioteer—  
 but enough of this, let us now proceed along this path."

On a ways, the spouse of Sitā stepped into a forest  
 —silent, boundless, tall; no birds called; no breezes blew within  
 330 that frightful woods; flowers—they which beautify a forest—  
 would not bloom. Here, there sunlight trickled through dense foliage,  
 but it was without strength, like the smile an invalid makes.

Beings by the thousands congregated suddenly round  
 that Raghu lord, eager, just like flies around a vat of  
 honey. Someone queried in a most pathetic voice, "Who  
 are you, O embodied one? Speak, by what virtue have you  
 ventured to this land? Are you god or mortal man, tell us  
 now. Speak, gratify us all, O fount of virtue, with your  
 nectar-laden rain of speech. Since that day Yama's henchmen  
 340 wrenched away our wretched lives, we have been without sounds made  
 of human tongue. Our eyes are content now that they have seen  
 your form, fine-limbed hero. Please satisfy these ears with speech."

The foe of Rākṣasas replied, "This slave of yours was born  
 among the Raghu clan, O spirits. The charioteer  
 Daśaratha is my father. His chief queen Kauśalyā,

is my mother. They call this servant of yours by the name  
of Rāma. Alas, I dwell through ill luck in the forest.

By Trisūli's orders, I am to meet my father. That  
is why, my friends, I came today to Kṛtānta's city."

350                 Retorted one among the spirits, "I know you, Indra  
among champions. By your arrows I lost my body in  
the Pañcavaṭī forest." With a start, the gem of men  
gazed at Rākṣasa Mārīca—now incorporeal.

Rāmacandra asked, "For what sin have you come here to this  
hellish forest, Rākṣasa, tell me that?" "The cause of this  
harsh punishment, alas, is mean Paulastya, Raghu king!"  
answered he, devoid of form. "It was to do his bidding  
that I deceived you, and consequently am condemned to  
this hell." Then along with Dūṣaṇa came Khara (Khara,  
360 or the sharp one, sharp as the keenest sword in battle, when  
he was alive), who, angered when they saw the Raghu lord,  
pride wounded, both slipped away, just as a viper, lacking  
poison-fangs, humbled, hides when it spots a mongoose. All of  
a sudden the forest filled with a colossal roar. Those  
ghosts dashed off. Dry leaves were flung about, as when a cyclone  
blows. Māyā told the monarch among champions, "Hear me, gem  
of Raghus, these spirits live in diverse pits. At times they  
come and wander through this forest of lament, lamenting



silently. See there, Yama's messengers mercilessly  
 370 drive them all away, each to his proper place." The one who  
 is the sun to Vaidehī's lotus heart saw herds of ghosts  
 with Yama's minions' horrifying shadows in pursuit.  
 Those ghosts ran swiftly panting, just as a deer herd fleet of foot  
 bounds off breathless, pursued by a hungry lion. Eyes moist,  
 Rāmacandra, sea of kindness, went sadly with Māyā.

A moment later that finest warrior shuddered as he  
 heard agonized screaming. He saw off in the distance some  
 thousand women, pallid, like the moon in daytime skies. One  
 of them tore at her long hair saying, "I always used to  
 380 bind you up prettily, to bind the hearts of randy men folk,  
 unheedful of my deeds and *dharma*, driven mad by youth's  
 intoxicating wine." Another scratched her breasts with her  
 own fingernails and said, "Alas, I spent my days for naught  
 adorning you in pearls and diamonds. And, in the end, what  
 came of that!" Yet another woman, from remorse, gouged out  
 her eyes (as cruel vultures do the eyes of carrion)  
 saying, "I used to outline you with kohl, wicked organs,  
 then smile and fling my arrows with your sidelong glances. In  
 mirrors I would gaze upon your brightness and feel contempt  
 390 for doe eyes. Is this, finally, the spoils of vanity?"

That throng of women departed, whimpering. Behind them

marched a matron of Kṛtānta, gruesome serpents hissing  
 through her tresses; her nails resembled sabers; her lips were  
 smeared with blood; her two banana-breasts hung down below her  
 navel, ever swinging to and fro; and flames leapt from her  
 two nostrils, then blended, augmenting the fire of her eyes.

Addressing Rāghava, Māyā spoke, "All such women as  
 you see before you, gem of Raghus, were much enamored  
 of clothes and fineries while on the surface of the earth.

400 These wanton women, driven by libido, would always  
 dress like the forest floor in springtime so as to lure the  
 hearts of desirous men to play at love. Now where is that  
 fetching beauty, prize of youth, alas?" Impulsively, an  
 echo echoed, "Now where is that fetching beauty, prize of  
 youth, alas!" Weeping, those women left, each for her own hell.

Again Māyā spoke, "Gaze once more before you, O foe of  
 Rākṣasas." That gem of men then saw another group of  
 women, infatuated with their beauty, their chignons

410 laced with fragrant blossoms, the might of Kāma's fire in their  
 doe-like eyes, the sweetest of ambrosial juices upon  
 their lips! Their necks, replete with jewels, were like the conch shell  
 of the king of gods; a filmy bodice made from gold threads  
 clothed the pulchritude that was their breasts with a mere pretext  
 of clothing, to show them off the more, intensifying

sensual cravings in hearts of lustful men. Their midribs  
 were quite svelte. From within blue silk (most sheer) their rounded thighs,  
 in contempt, it seemed, for any covering at all, showed  
 teasingly their banana-tree-shaped splendor, as did those  
 Apsarās' exquisite naked bodies while cavorting  
 420 in the waters of Lake Mānasa. Ankle-bells rang from  
 their feet, an ornamental girdle round their hips. *Vīṇā*,  
*rabāb* strings, and tiny cymbals, each merrily in its  
 own style, blended sweetly with *mṛdaṅga* drums' gay beat. Those  
 shapely women undulated on those waves of music.

From elsewhere there appeared a gathering of handsome men,  
 laughing softly, good-looking like the warrior-god, hero  
 Kārttikeya, the favorite of the Kṛttikās, or,  
 O Rati, like your Manmatha, he for whom your heart craves.

On noticing that group of men, the womenfolk, in a  
 430 tizzy from lust's juices, flung their arrows of flirtatious  
 sidelong looks—bangles jingled musically round their wrists.  
 On their hot breath rose the pollen from the flowers in their  
 garlands and, like dust, soon blurred good judgment's sun. The men had  
 lost the battle, but is there strength in men to win such wars?

Just as the bird and his mate lose themselves in games of love  
 while frolicking, these suave sophisticates caught hold of those  
 coquettes, sauntered to the woods—for what purpose, eye told eye!

Suddenly the forest filled with shrieks! Astounded, Rāma  
 saw those men and women wrestling with each other, rolling  
 440 on the ground, biting, scratching, pummeling with clenched fists and  
 kicking. They tore their hair, gouged eyes, clawed at nose and mouth with  
 adamantine fingernails. Earth was soaked by streams of blood.  
 Both the parties struggled fiercely, just as Bhīma, dressed in  
 women's clothing, fought with Kīcaka in Virāṭa. There  
 came all of Yama's henchmen, quickly driving the two sides  
 apart, beating them with iron *lāṭhis*. In gentle tones,  
 pretty Māyā spoke to Rāghava, joy of Raghu's clan,

"Listen, my child, these men in life were slaves to Kāma; those  
 seductive women served Kāma as his handmaids. They both  
 450 indulged their carnal appetites unbridled, ah alas,  
 drowning *dharma* in the waters of non-*dharma*, shedding  
 shame—now punishment is meted out in Yama's city.  
 Just as a mirage deceives the thirsty person on a  
 desert and just as the golden grace of *mākāla* fruit  
 defrauds the famished, such is the case with copulation.  
 The cravings of both partners are never satisfied in  
 full. What more need I say, my child, look for yourself. Such pain,  
 O lucky one, many sinners suffer in the mortal  
 world, before they come to hell. This is Fate's decree: He who  
 460 spends his youth immorally becomes debilitated

later on in life. Undampable are the flames of sex,  
 which will consume one's heart; unquenchable is the rage of  
 Fate that, like lust's fire, burns one's body, mighty-armed one, I  
 tell you. In the end, this is the lot of just such sinners."

Bowing low before the feet of Māyā, the gem of men  
 said, "All these strange things I have witnessed in this land, by your  
 grace, O Mother, who could possibly describe them all? But  
 where is the kingly sage? I shall beg at his feet for young  
 Lakṣmaṇa. Lead me to his dwelling place—this is my wish."

470 Smiling, Māyā replied, "This city is huge, Rāghava,  
 I have shown you but a tiny portion. Were we two to  
 wander, champion, endlessly for twelve years through Kṛtānta's  
 realm, even then we would not see all the sections. Beyond  
 the eastern gate reside, with husbands, faithful wives who were  
 devoted to their mates; that portion of this city is  
 unparalleled in heaven or on earth; magnificent  
 mansions stand in pleasant floral groves; most delightful ponds  
 always brim with lovely lotuses; spring breezes humming  
 sweetly flow forever; many of the finest cuckoos  
 480 sing constantly their special *pā* note. Spontaneously  
*vīṇās* sound, as do *muraja* drums, small cymbals, flutes, and  
 seven honeyed tones from *saptasvarās*. Yogurt, milk, and  
 ghee gush from springs continuously, all about; mangoes,

the ambrosial fruit, ripen in the orchards; Annadā  
 herself serves exquisite foods. Delicious fare of every  
 sort (what one chews, sucks, licks, or drinks) one has for the asking,  
 as in heaven from the ever fruitful wish-fulfilling  
 vine, great archer. We do not have business there. Go, hero,  
 through the northern gate and amble for a while in that fine  
 490 place. Soon you shall see your father's feet, jewel among men."

Heading north, the two of them proceeded hurriedly. The  
 spouse of Sītā saw some hundred mountains bald and scorched, ah,  
 as though from flames of godly fury! Some held heaps of snow  
 on the summits of their highest peaks; others of them roared  
 repeatedly, disgorging fire, melting boulders in their  
 fiery streams, blanketing the sky with ashes, filling the  
 surrounding countryside with rumblings. His lordship saw a  
 hundred endless deserts; hot winds blew ceaselessly, driving  
 on ahead dunes of sand, like waves. That warrior observed a  
 500 vast expanse of water, sea-like, its far shore unseen. In  
 one spot raged a storm, whipping up whitecaps tall as mountains.  
 In another, still waters stood, growing stagnant. Monstrous  
 frogs cavorted there, croaking gravely, and a tangle of  
 gigantic snakes, bodies endless like that of Śeṣa! In  
 yet another place *halāhala* poison simmered, just  
 as in the ocean at the time of churning it. Sinners

piteously roamed this land, whining. Snakes struck, scorpions  
stung, and there were insects with huge pincers. Flames beneath the  
earth's surface, bitter cold in the air! Alas, who ever  
510 finds a moment's rest before this northern gate! With quickened  
pace, that finest charioteer moved along with Māyā.

When the shore draws near, once the helmsman with great effort has  
traversed a lonely stretch of water, and the wind, bosom  
friend of fragrance borne from flower gardens, rushes out to  
greet him, and his ears are soothed to hear the cuckoo's call, mixed  
with human voices, after many days away—then that  
boatman is afloat upon a sea of ecstasy. With  
like feelings did the best of Raghus hear some music not  
far off. That noble one, dumbfounded, saw golden mansions  
520 all around, lush gardens filled with golden blossoms, deep ponds,  
repositories for the fresh blue lotuses. In a  
pleasant voice Māyā said, "It is through this gate, O warrior,  
all great charioteers who fall in face-to-face battle  
go to savor everlasting happiness. Limitless,  
O noble one, is the sense of joy in this locale. Come  
along by this garden path, my firm-armed one, for I shall  
show to you the celebrated, by whose fame the city  
of Sañjivanī is scented, like a fragrance through a  
garden. In the land of virtue, Fortune's smile shines like the

530 moon, sun, and stars, brilliantly, day after day." Intrigued, that  
warrior walked on briskly. Ahead went Māyā, trident in  
hand. In due course, that hero noticed a field before him—  
like a battle ground. In one place, spears stood stately like some  
śāla forest. Elsewhere an array of horses whinnied,  
fitted in their martial trappings. Yet elsewhere trumpeted  
an Indra among elephants. Shield-wielding soldiers gamed,  
gripping sword and shield. Some place else some wrestlers grappled on  
the turf. Banners fluttered, as if exhilarated by  
the battle. In yet another region on his flowered  
540 seat, a golden *vīṇā* in his hand, enchanting to his  
audience, sat the poet singing songs in praise of the  
Kṣatriya clan. Inspired by that music, warriors cheered.  
Heaps of *pārijāta* blooms were rained down, I do not know  
by whom, filling the environs with sweet scents. Apsarās  
cavorted, and Kinnaras vocalized, as in heaven.

Māyā spoke to Rāghava, "All charioteers slain in  
face-to-face combat in the Satya *yuga* you see on  
this field today, crest-jewel of Kṣatriyas. Look there,  
Niśumbha, body gold-hued like Mount Hemakūṭa; the  
550 glow from his diadem ascends the skies, a valorous  
charioteer—Caṇḍī, born of gods' joined powers, vanquished  
in pitched battle that monarch among champions. Look, Śumbha,



stately as the trident-holder Śambhu. And over there,  
 mighty Mahiṣāsura, breaker of horses. And there,  
 the champion and fine warrior Tripura, Tripurāri's  
 foe. And Vṛtra and other Daityas, renowned throughout the  
 world. See there Sunda and Upasunda, once more floating  
 calmly on the waters of fraternal love." The noble  
 Rāghava inquired, "Tell me, kind one, why do I not  
 560 see Kumbhakarṇa, Atikāya, Narāntaka (he  
 who means the death to mortal men in warfare), as well as  
 Indrajit, and all other Rākṣasa charioteers?"

Replied the sorceress, "Before one's funeral is performed,  
 one does not gain access to this city, O husband of  
 Vaidehī. On the city's fringes such beings wander  
 unless and until their obsequies are carried out by  
 friends—I relate to you what Fate decrees. Take note, O best  
 of charioteers, a fine warrior heads our way. I shall  
 stand beside you, O jewel among men, invisible.  
 570 Enjoy a pleasant talk." So saying, Mother disappeared.

Startled, the best of Raghus gazed upon that sterling lord  
 of warriors. Lightning danced atop his diadem. From that  
 prodigious figure, his raiment shone quite dazzling to the  
 eye. Lance in hand, he strode the stride of a bull elephant.

Coming closer, that lord of champions, addressing Rāma,

questioned, "For what purpose do you travel here today in  
 your physical form, crown-jewel of the Raghu clan? It  
 was in unfair combat that you slew me, to gratify  
 Sugrīva. But put aside your fears. We know no malice  
 580 in Kṛtānta's city, for here everyone has subdued  
 his passions. The stream of human life, which flows so murky  
 on the surface of the earth, courses limpid through this land.  
 I am Vāli." Much chagrined, the gem of men recognized  
 that monarch of Kiṣkindhyā, an Indra among warriors.  
 Vāli added, smiling, "Come along with me, O warrior  
 Dāśarathi. See that garden not far off, my lord, full  
 of golden flowers; charioteer Jaṭāyu strolls through  
 that arbor all the time, in your father's company. That  
 hero will be overjoyed to see you. The noble one  
 590 gave his life, acting in accord with *dharma*, in order  
 that he rescue a chaste woman then in danger. For that  
 reason is his honor boundless. Now come along quickly."

The foe of Rākṣasas queried, "Tell me kindly, O good  
 charioteer, are all equally content within this  
 realm?" "In the deep recesses of a mine," Vāli answered,  
 "a thousand precious stones are formed, O Rāghava. All are  
 not of equal radiance, mind you; but is there any,  
 tell me, jewel among Raghus, totally devoid of

luster?" In this way the two of them conversed at leisure.

600 Through that pleasant grove where babbled constantly a stream of  
nectar waters, the gem of men saw Jaṭāyu, son of  
Garuḍa, a god-like charioteer, ensconced upon  
a platform fashioned out of ivory and inlaid with  
a profusion of gems! Notes from the *vīṇā* were heard all  
about. A glow the tint of lotus petals made those woods  
radiant, as does sunshine filtered through temporary  
awnings at the house wherein there is a celebration.  
Fragrant vernal breezes wafted there. Affectionately  
that warrior spoke to Rāghava, "My eyes are soothed today  
610 to see you, jewel of the human family, offspring of  
my friend! Praise be to you! Auspicious one, your mother had  
conceived you at a most auspicious moment! Praise be to  
my erstwhile companion, Daśaratha, he who gave you  
life! You are favored by the god clan; hence you can come in  
your own body to this city. Speak, my precious, let me  
hear the news of battle. Has the wicked Rāvaṇa been  
felled in combat?" Bowing out of deference, his lordship  
spoke most sweetly, "By grace of those two feet of yours, revered  
elder, I slew countless Rākṣasas in heated warfare.  
620 Rāvaṇa, sovereign of the Rākṣasas, is now the sole  
surviving warrior in that city of the Rākṣasas.

It was by that one's arrows that noble Lakṣmaṇa, my  
 younger brother, lost his life. Your slave has come today on  
 Śiva's orders to this land most hard to reach, . Please tell this  
 servant where his father, friend of yours, may be found, warrior."

Hero Jaṭāyu spoke, "That kingly sage resides among  
 the other royal sages, through the western gate. It is  
 not prohibited for me to venture to that land. I  
 shall escort you. Come along, O enemy subduer."

630 That noble one observed fascinating places of all  
 sorts, golden mansions, many god-like charioteers. On  
 banks of lakes, in flower gardens, beings gamboled in great  
 delight, just as in the springtime honeybees buzz about  
 in pleasant wooded groves, or as at night fireflies light up  
 the ten directions. The two proceeded with quickened pace,  
 as thousands of those beings crowded around Rāghava.

Hero Jaṭāyu announced, "This grand charioteer was  
 born among the Raghus. In somatic form, by Śiva's  
 orders, he comes to this city of the spirits to gaze  
 640 upon his father's feet. Bless him, then be off, all of you,  
 each to his own station, creatures." All wished him well, then left.  
 The two proceeded blissfully. In one direction a  
 golden-bodied mountain peak held its crown of trees up to  
 the skies, like the crown of matted hair upon Kapardī,

mendicant with matted hair. Little streams skipped and gurgled.  
 Diamonds, other gems, and pearls were visible in crystal  
 waters. Here and there in valleys, green tracts of earth were decked  
 with flower blossoms. Lakes had formed, embossed with lotuses.  
 Constantly the finest cuckoos cooed throughout the woodlands.

650           The son of Vinatā's son, addressing Rāghava, spoke,  
 "Look, jewel among Raghus, the western gate, all of gold,  
 the houses in this wondrous land are made with diamonds. Look  
 there, beneath that golden tree above whose stately head is  
 spread a canopy of emerald leaves sits Dilīpa, gem  
 of men, upon a throne of gold, beside his faithful wife  
 Sudakṣiṇā. Worship with devotion the founder of  
 your lineage. In this land dwell countless royal rishis—  
 Ikṣvāku, Māndhātā, Nahuṣa, all world-recognized.  
 Step forward, honor your forefather, O mighty-armed one!"

660           Advancing, that monarch of charioteers fell prostrate  
 at the couple's feet. Conferring his blessing, Dilīpa  
 asked, "Who are you? Tell me how you came in bodily form  
 to this land of spirits, god-like charioteer? When I  
 gaze upon your moon-like face, my heart is buoyed up, on a  
 sea of bliss." Sudakṣiṇā then spoke in honeyed tones, "O  
 fortunate one, tell us at once, who are you? Just as when  
 in foreign lands the sight of one's own countryman pleases,

just so are my eyes delighted, seeing you. What righteous  
 woman in her womb conceived you at a most auspicious  
 670 time, high-minded lad? If indeed you are born of gods, O  
 godly one, why bow before us two? If not a god, then,  
 like a god among mankind, which clan do you glorify?"

Dāśarathi, hands cupped in supplication, answered, "Your  
 son, named Raghu, kingly sage, renowned the whole world over,  
 that world-conqueror, by his own might, gained conquest over  
 the entire world. To him was born a son, named Aja  
 —protector of the earth; Indumatī married Aja;  
 from her womb was born high-minded Daśaratha; his chief  
 queen is Kauśalyā; your thrall was born of her. The sons of  
 680 mother Sumitrā, lion Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna,  
 are vanquishers of foes in battle. Mother Kaikeyī,  
 your lordship, bore my brother Bharata in her belly."

The regal sage responded, "So you are Rāmacandra,  
 coronet of the Ikṣvāku clan. I bestow upon  
 you blessings. May your fame be constantly proclaimed across  
 the world, for as long as moon and sun rise in the sky, famed  
 one. My lineage shines upon the surface of the earth  
 due to all your virtues, O paragon of virtue. That  
 gold mountain you see there, at its base and famous in this  
 690 region stands a banyan tree, its name Imperishable,

atop the Vaitaraṇī river's bank. Beneath that tree  
 your father worships faithfully king Dharma on behalf  
 of you. O mighty-armed, ornament of the Raghu clan,  
 go to him. Warrior Daśaratha grieves for your sorrows."

The gem of men, excited, bowed before those lotus feet,  
 bade good-bye to warrior Jaṭāyu, and set out on his  
 own (accompanied by Māyā in the void) to where that  
 scintillating golden mountain stood, then saw that best of  
 warriors underneath the tree Imperishable—on the  
 700 Vaitaraṇī's riverbank, whose waters run like nectar  
 through this land—its golden branches, emerald leaves, its fruit,  
 alas, who can describe the luster of that fruit? that king  
 of trees, prayed to by the gods, and grantor of salvation.

From afar the kingly sage caught sight of his fine son, stretched  
 out his arms (chest wet with tears) and said, "Have you, who are to  
 me much more than life, come at last to this land most hard to  
 reach, by favor of the gods, to please this pair of eyes? Have  
 I recovered you today, my long lost treasure? Aha,  
 how shall I tell you, Rāmabhadra, how I suffered in  
 710 your absence? Just as iron melts in fire's power, so did  
 I, in sorrow over you, and left my mortal body  
 prematurely. I shut my eyes, alas, my heavy heart  
 on fire. Harsh Fate, my child, for misdeeds of mine has written

pain and struggle, ah me, on your forehead, you who always tread the path of *dharma*! That is why all this happened. That is why, alas, Kaikeyī, like a female elephant in heat, trampled under foot the creeper of my hopes, that which made the garden of my life so beautiful." Warrior Daśaratha wailed while Dāśarathi wept in silence.

720           That best of Raghus spoke, "O Father, now your servant bobs upon a shoreless sea. Who can save him in these dire straits? If what transpires on the earth is known within this city, then it is surely not unknown to those fair feet of yours the reasons why your slave has ventured to this region. Well before his time, alas, my dearest younger brother died today in cruelest battle! If I cannot have him back, I shall not return to where the gem of day and moon and stars shine gloriously! Order me and I shall die right before you, Father! I cannot live in separation

730           from him!" cried the gem of men at his father's feet. Moved by his child's sorrow, Daśaratha said, "I do know for what reason you have traveled to this city, son. Earnestly I worship sovereign Dharma, gladly making offerings of water with my cupped hands, all for your well-being. You shall have your Lakṣmaṇa, you who bear auspicious markings. His life is yet confined in his body, like a captive



held inside a crumbling prison. On the peak of fair Mount  
 Gandhamādana grows the greatest curative, my dear,  
 Viśalyakaraṇī, a golden creeper. Fetch it and  
 740 revive your younger brother. King Yama himself freely  
 told of such a remedy today. Devoted servant,  
 Hanumān, son of the swift, he who moves with speed, send him.  
 In an instant he, that awesome hero, the equal of  
 Prabhañjana, will bring the medicine. In due time you  
 will vanquish Rāvaṇa in a fierce battle. By your darts  
 that wicked one will perish, and with him his entire  
 lineage. My daughter-in-law, Lakṣmī of the Raghu  
 clan, that little mother, will return and once again will  
 brighten up the Raghu household—yet it is not your luck,  
 750 dear child, to savor happiness. For just as myrrh, alas,  
 enduring suffering, smolders in its censer as it  
 scents with sweet aroma the surroundings, so too famed one,  
 will the homeland of the Bhāratas be filled with your sweet  
 fame. It is due to sins of mine that Fate has punished you  
 —I perished for my own sins, in separation from you.

"Only half the night has now elapsed on earth. Return at  
 once by godly might to Laṅkā, hero. Dispatch forthwith  
 warrior Hanumān. Fetch the cure while yet it is still dark."

Daśaratha blessed the champion Dāśarathi. In hopes

760 of taking dust from his father's feet, the son had offered  
lotus hands to those lotus-like extremities—but in  
vain, for he failed to touch those feet! In a reassuring  
voice, Aja's son, born of Raghu, said to Daśaratha's  
son, "This is not my former body that you see here, you  
who are much more than life to me. It is but a shadow.  
How can you, corporeal one, touch this shadow? Like an  
image in a mirror, or in water, is my body.  
Now without delay, my dearest one, return to Lañkā."

Bowing, speechless, toward those feet, that noble one departed,  
770 accompanied by Māyā. Shortly that hero reached the  
spot where good warrior Lakṣmaṇa lay still upon the ground.  
That throng of warriors stood about, sleepless in their sorrow.

Thus ends canto number eight,  
called "city of the spirits,"  
in the poem

*The Slaying of Meghanāda*