

Star-studded Night smiled from her heavenly abode, but, at
Vaijayanta, Mahendra fretted. Arising from his
flower-bed, the celestial regions' lord sat mute on his
gemmed throne—other gods lay fast asleep in golden temples.

Feigning wounded pride, the queen of the skies spoke coyly, "By
what fault, O monarch of divines, has your thrall offended
you? else why do you withhold the touch of your feet from our
bedchamber? See there, Menakā's heavy eyelids droop shut
for a moment, then again she opens wide, startled; and
10 look at Urvaśī, practically unmoving now. Charming
Citralekhā seems as if a painted doll. It is in
dread of you, husband, that respite-giving goddess Sleep keeps
her distance; for whom else does she have to fear? In dead of
night, tell me, please, who is still awake, anywhere? Is there
some Daitya army camped at heaven's gates, set to attack?"

Replied the foe of Asuras, "I am worried, goddess.
How will champion Lakṣmaṇa slay the Rākṣasa? Chaste one,
invincible is Rāvaṇi, Indra among warriors."

"You have, my husband, garnered weapons," responded ever
20 youthful Paulomī, "with which the champion Tārakāri
slew Tāraka. It is your good luck that Virūpākṣa
sides with you. Pārvatī herself decreed, upon request
of me, her humble servant, that what you wish would come to

pass tomorrow. Māyā, queen among the goddesses, will
herself arrange the slaying—so, why worry, dearest spouse?"

Replied the foe of Daityas, "What you say is very true,
queen of the Indra among gods; those weapons I, indeed,
have sent to Laṅkā. But by what stratagem will Māyā
maintain Lakṣmaṇa in his war with Rākṣasas, my wide-
30 eyed one—that I cannot imagine. I am well aware
Sumitrā's son is a great hero; but when, my goddess,
is the elephant an even match against the king of
beasts? I have heard the roll of thunder, my fine-featured one,
the loud crackling of the clouds; I have seen the lightning flash,
those streaks of fire ever scintillate upon my transport.
But my heart quakes, goddess, when Meghanāda roars enraged,
when that archer sets to bow a fiery arrow cluster
and howls his hideous howl; even Airāvata quails
when faced with that one's ghastly bludgeon!" Heaving a sigh of
40 dejection, the lord of the divines fell silent; herself
sighing sadly (a true wife's heart laments her husband's grief
always), heaven's queen took her seat beside the Indra of
the gods. Urvaśī, Menakā, Rambhā, and the charming
Citralekhā stood around them, just as on a pond at
night beams of nectar from the moon surround in silence closed
lotus blooms, or as a row of lamps surrounds Ambikā's

altar during the autumn Durgā Pūjā when Bengal,
 beside herself with joy, welcomes home her ever longed-for
 little mother! Without a sound the couple sat there. At
 50 that very moment there arrived the goddess Māyā. A
 refulgence born of gems increased two fold in that godly
 dwelling, just as golden splendor from *mandāra* blossoms
 in the paradisiacal garden, Nandana by
 name, is accentuated from sunbeams' intertwining.

With much deference that god and goddess bowed before her
 lotus feet. Māyā blessed them both, then took her seat upon
 her throne of gold. Hands cupped in supplication, the wealth of
 the divines inquired, "Your wish, Mother? Inform this slave."

60 Replied the one possessed of *māyā*, "I am setting off
 for Laṅkā, Āditeya; there I shall satisfy your
 wish and crush the crown-gem of the clan of Rākṣasas this
 day by stealth. Notice, Night slips away. Purandara, soon
 that world-delighting Dawn will make her smiling presence known
 upon the summit of the rising-hill; lotus-Laṅkā's
 sun will then descend the setting-hill. I shall escort, O
 enemy of Asuras, Lakṣmaṇa to the temple
 of the sacrifice called Nikumbhilā. And I shall snare
 the Rākṣasa in a net of *māyā*. Himself devoid
 of weapons, that hero weakened by a blow from godly

70 weaponry and helpless (like a lion in a snare) will
 perish— who can contravene Fate's edict? Rāvaṇi shall
 die for sure in battle; but once the ruling Rākṣasa
 is informed, how will you rescue Rāmānuja, Rāma,
 and wise Vibhīṣaṇa, the Raghu's ally? Overwrought
 with grieving for his son, that champion will then join the fray,
 O Indra of the gods, fierce-armed like Kṛtānta himself.
 Who can best him? Consider what I say, lord of the gods."

 Answered Śacī's husband, the slayer of Namuci, "If
 Meghanāda were to fall, felled by Saumitri's arrows,
 80 O grand Māyā, I, with an army of the gods, would join
 the war against the Rākṣasas tomorrow and rescue
 Lakṣmaṇa. By your grace, O goddess, I have no fear of
 Rāvaṇa! You first strike a blow, Mother, spreading out your
 net of *māyā*. Strike down the pride of the Karbūra clan,
 that Rāvaṇi, in war a fearsome fighter. Rāghava-
 candra is the favored of the god clan; the immortals
 would do battle for him, Mother, as though their very lives
 depended on it. I personally tomorrow shall go
 to earth, shall burn those Karbūras with swift shafts of lightning."

90 "That is indeed your proper task, thunderbolt-wielding son
 of Aditi," said Māyā, "I am heartened by your words,
 best of gods. Now by your leave, I shall be off to Laṅkā."

With that, the queen of Śaktis blessed them both and left. Sleep then
drew near and humbly bowed before the Indra of the gods.

Grasping Indrāṇī's lotus-hand lightheartedly, the great
Indra went inside their sleeping chamber—blissful haven.

Citrālekḥā, Urvāśī, Menakā, and Rambhā—all

departed quickly for their own quarters. There they shed their
bracelets, waistbands, jingling girdles, anklet bells, and other

100

ornaments; they doffed their bodices, then lay upon their

flower beds, those celestial beauties, figures just like sun-

beams. Breezes—melodious, mellifluous—wafted, now

through ringlets, now atop high breasts, now across their moon-like

faces—amorous, they sported, as do tipsy honey-

bees when they come upon full-blown blossoms in the forest.

Grand goddess Māyā reached heaven's golden gates; on their own
those gold doors opened sweetly. That captivating woman,

once outside, calling goddess Dream to mind, spoke liltily,

"Go to Laṅkā, to where champion Saumitri is encamped.

110

Dressed as Sumitrā, take your seat at the head of his bed

and tell him this, voluptuous one, 'Get up, my child, for

Night has gone. At Laṅkā's northern gate among a stand of

trees there shines a lake; on its bank rests a golden Caṇḍī

temple. Bathe in that lake, then pluck a bunch of flowers and

offer worship most devotedly to that mother who

quells Dānavas. By her grace, celebrated one, will you
 with ease destroy the frenzied Rākṣasa. Alone, my pet,
 proceed into those woods.' Goddess Dream, without adieu, go
 to Laṅkā. See there, Night retreats. There can be no delay."

120 Off went Dream, the goddess. Blue skies intensified while stars
 appeared as if to flake away and fall to earth. Quickly
 she descended into Rāmānuja's tent; disguised as
 Sumitrā, that sorceress sat by his head and whispered
 tenderly, "Get up, my child, for Night has gone. At Laṅkā's
 northern gate among a stand of trees there shines a lake; on
 its bank rests a golden Caṇḍī temple. Bathe in that lake,
 then pluck a bunch of flower blossoms and offer worship
 reverently to the mother who quells Dānavas. By her
 grace, O celebrated one, will you with ease destroy
 130 the frenzied Rākṣasa. Go alone, my pet, into those woods."

 Startled, that hero rose and gazed round about. Alas, an
 unchecked gush of tears made moist his chest. "O Mother," cried out
 plaintively that Indra among warriors, "why are you so
 callous toward this slave of yours? Show yourself again that I
 might worship those two feet of yours; to take the dust from them
 would gratify my heart's fond dream, mother fondest! When I
 call to mind how much you wept as I bid farewell, my heart
 breaks! In this worthless life of mine, Mother, shall I ever

see your pair of feet again?" Wiping dry the rivulets
140 of tears, that elephant of warriors strode with the gait of
pachyderms to where his lord, monarch of the Raghus, stood.

Said the younger-born, bowing to his elder brother's feet,
"I just saw a wondrous dream, sovereign of the Raghu clan.

Near the head of my bed sat my mother, Sumitrā, who
said most tenderly, 'Get up, my child, for Night has gone. At
Lañkā's northern gate among a stand of trees there shines a
lake; on its bank rests a golden Caṇḍī temple. Bathe in
the lake, then pluck a bunch of flowers and offer worship
most devotedly to the mother who quells Dānavas.

150 By her grace, celebrated one, will you with ease destroy
the frenzied Rākṣasa. Alone, my pet, proceed into
those woods.' Having said that, Mother disappeared. I cried out
but got no answer. What is your command, gem of Raghus."

Vaidehī's joy asked Vibhīṣaṇa, "What do you say, O
best among confederates? You are known throughout the world
as Rāghava's rescuer in this land of Rākṣasas."

Replied the finest of the Rākṣasas, "There is in the
woods, my lordship, a Caṇḍī temple on the lake shore. The
ruler of the Rākṣasas worships Satī in that grove.

160 No one else ever goes there, intimidated by that
frightful place. I have heard that Śambhu—fearsome trident in

his hand— stalks about the entrance. He who worships Mother there is victorious throughout the world. What more can I say? If you have the nerve, Saumitri, to penetrate those woods, then, O charioteer, all your wishes will come true."

"O most excellent of Rākṣasas, this servant follows Rāghava's command," responded hero Lakṣmaṇa, "if ordered, I shall go forth with ease into that forest. Who is there to thwart me?" In honeyed tones the monarch of the Rāghavas declared, "You have suffered much on my account, dear one. When I dwell on that, my heart wants not to impose upon you further. But what am I to do? How could I go against a godly order, Brother? Proceed with care— and with the force of *dharma*, great hero! Let favor from the god clan protect you, as if armor made of iron!"

Bowing to Rāghava's feet and hailing Vibhīṣaṇa, Saumitri, sword in hand, set off fearless, moving in haste toward the northern gateway. There confederate Sugrīva stood alert, the very image of a Vitihotra in amongst his troops. On hearing footsteps, the champion barked gruffly, "Who are you? For what purpose are you here on this dark night? Speak at once, if you wish to live! Otherwise, I shall crush your head with stones!" Retorted Rāmānuja good-naturedly, "Destruction to the clan of Rākṣasas, O

gem of warriors! I serve Rāghava." Advancing smartly,
 Sugrīva saluted Lakṣmaṇa his comrade, Indra
 among warriors. Mollifying with kind words Kiṣkindhyā's
 king, the joy of Ūrmilā continued further northward.

190 A while later, that one of mighty limbs reached the entrance
 to the grove, and much to his surprise saw not far ahead
 a gigantic figure. From its forehead shone a crescent
 moon, just like the gemstone on a monstrous serpent's forehead.
 Atop its head sat a pile of matted hair onto which
 there poured the frothy waters of the Jāhnavī, like some
 silvery streak of moonlight on an autumn night across
 the surface of a mass of clouds. Its body had been smeared
 with ashes; in its right hand, a trident massive like a
śāla tree. Saumitri recognized the lord of Bhūtas.
 Unsheathing his shining sword, that lion among warriors
 200 roared, "Charioteer Daśaratha, son of Raghu's son,
 Aja, world-renowned—it is his son—this slave—who bows
 before your feet, Candracūḍa! Let me pass, for I shall
 march into the woods and worship Caṇḍī; if unwilling,
 then battle me, your minion! The overlord of Laṅkā
 is engaged in deeds opposed to *dharma*; should you choose to
 wage war on his side, Virūpākṣa, then let us fight—I
 brook no delays! With Dharma as my witness, I challenge

you—if Dharma be for justice, I shall win for certain!"

210 As the king of mountains, hearing crackling thunder, answers
back with echoing rumbles, in like style Vṛṣadhvaja
bellowed gravely, "I do commend your bravery, Lakṣmaṇa,
crown-gem of champions. How can I fight you? The propitious
goddess is pleased with you, lucky one." Kapardī, keeper
of the gate, stepped aside; Saumitri strode into the woods.

220 At a ferocious lion's roar that warrior stiffened. The
dense forest reverberated on all sides with sounds of
crashing. Out leapt a lion whose yellow eyes shone blood-red;
he flicked his tail and gnashed his teeth together. With a cry
of "Hail to Rāma," that charioteer bared his sword. The
māyā-lion turned and fled, as does darkness in the face
of Hutāśana's might. Calmly, resolutely, that wise
one advanced bravely. Of a sudden clouds, booming, belching,
masked the moon. Winds whipped up, howling. Streaks of lightning lit the
skies, while the land, following those momentary gifts of
brilliance, seemed twice as dark. Thunderbolts clapped violently as
they struck the earth repeatedly. Prabhañjana, by strength
of arms, toppled trees. A forest fire gained access to those
woods. Golden Laṅkā shook, and a ways away the ocean
roared as though some thousand conch shells, blaring on a field of
230 battle, blended with the clatter of the strumming bowstrings.

Like a stolid mountain, the hero stood his ground in that
 hellish confrontation. Then, as suddenly as it all
 began, the conflagration was extinguished; the raucous
 storm subsided; the husband of the stars showed himself once
 more; and stars shone beautifully throughout the sky. Mother earth,
 coifed in her flower-tresses, gaily smiled. Sweetly scented
 fragrances cavorted while the gentle breezes murmured.

Wonder struck, the high-minded one with determination
 strode on. Suddenly the woods swelled with the tinkling of bells.

240 A flute, a *vīṇā*, a *mṛdaṅga* drum, small cymbals, and
 a *saptasvarā* sounded; surging with that music were
 other tones born of women's voices, pleasing to the mind.

That hero saw before him, in a grove filled with flowers,
 a troupe of damsels, like some starry constellation that
 had fallen to this earth. A few of them were bathing in
 the lake, crystal clear, looking ever so like moonbeams at
 midnight. Fine silken bodices adorned the bank while their
 figures, in those limpid waters—ah, golden lotuses
 upon Lake Mānasa. Some gathered blossoms for bouquets;
 250 others dressed their locks of hair, those chains of love. Still others
 held in hand *vīṇās* crafted out of ivory, pearls inlaid—
 strings of gold glistened from atop those repositories
 of music's *rasa*. A number of the giddy maids were

dancing; in the cleavage, twixt two plump breasts, necklaces of
jewels swung from side to side, ankle bells jingled round their
feet, and ornamental girdles jangled on those buttocks.

Men perish from the fatal bite of deadly cobras—but,
when they feast their eyes on those gem-studded serpents swaying
to and fro, down the backs of maidens, men's hearts, from passion's
260 venom, merely are inflamed. They flee in terror when they
spot the hooded snake, Kṛtānta's messenger—yet, alas,
when these other cobras bob and weave, how can men help but
want to wrap them round their head and neck, as does Umā's spouse,
the serpent-wearing trident-wielder. On tree limbs cuckoos,
those companions of Springtime, were aroused and singing; not
far off, water fountains splashed and played. Wantonly, breezes
coursed, looting aromatic treasures from the flower houses.

Without the slightest trace of reticence, that troupe of maids
crowded round the foe-conqueror, singing, "Welcome, O crown-
270 jewel of the Raghus! We are not Nisācaris but
rather denizens of heaven. We dwell, O champion, in
a golden temple within the paradisiacal
park called Nandana; there we gaily sip elixir of
eternal life. Unending springtime ever flowers in
youth's garden; our paired lotus-blossom breasts are constantly
in full bloom; the nectar never dries upon our pond-like

lips; we are immortal maidens, your lordship. All of us
 extend to you our most cordial of welcomes. Come, sir, with
 us—we shall give to you, O gem of virtues, the pleasures
 280 men, age after age, performed severe austerities to
 obtain. Disease, sorrow, and the like—all those worms which eat
 away life's flower in this mortal world—not one of them
 infests the land where we reside in eternal bliss." Palms
 pressed together Saumitri spoke, "O covey of divine
 lovelies, please forgive this slave of yours. My elder brother,
 a charioteer renowned throughout the world, is Rāma-
 candra; Maithilī is his spouse; the lord of Rākṣasas
 found her alone in the forest and abducted her. Once
 I have overcome that Rākṣasa in mortal combat,
 290 I shall free chaste Jānakī. Grant me a boon, maids divine,
 that this pledge of mine might come to pass. I was born into
 the world of man; I respect you all as though you were my
 mother." With that the strong-armed one raised his head and saw the
 woods deserted. The women gone as in a dream, or as
 evanescent bubbles found in water. Who comprehends
 Māyā's *māyā* in this mundane world of *māyā*? Again,
 calmly and somewhat circumspect, the hero pushed on, awed.

Thereupon that best of champions spied a lake not far off.

On its bank stood the Caṇḍī temple, a hundred golden

300 gem-encrusted steps led down to the water. That hero
saw a lighted lamp in the temple; by the altar's base
lay a heap of flowers; a bronze gong, a conch shell, and a
bell were sounding; there was water in a pot; and smoke rose
from a censer, blending with the redolence of floral
scents, permeating the surroundings with sweet aromas.
That Indra among champions climbed down to the water and
there bathed; with utmost care he plucked a bluish lotus; at
that, the ten directions filled with luxurious perfume.

Saumitri, a lion of Indras among warriors, went
310 inside the temple and offered worship properly to
her who rides a lion.¹ "O Varadā," Rāmānuja
called out, prostrating himself, "bestow upon this slave a
boon. Let me slay the Rākṣasa champion, Mother, this I
beg of you. O Antaryāminī, can the human tongue
articulate all you know about man's inmost thoughts? Pure
woman, sate each unspoken longing of this heart." Afar,
clouds boomed; Laṅkā trembled under sudden bolts of lightning.
The woods, the temple, and the lake itself rocked shore to shore,
shaking violently—as though caught in a major earthquake.

320 Before him hero Lakṣmaṇa saw the great Māyā on
her golden throne. The sheer intensity of her brilliance
dazzled his eyes momentarily with coruscation

as of lightning. Blinded, that hero saw about him a
darkened temple. Then Satī smiled. With that, the darkness at
once disappeared, and the high-minded one gained supernal
vision! as waves of honeyed voices wafted through the skies.

The grand Māyā spoke, "Most pleased with you today, son of chaste
Sumitrā, are all the gods and goddesses. Vāsava
has sent you weapons of the gods. On Śiva's orders I
330 myself have come to expedite this task of yours. Take up
your godly weapons, warrior, and then with Vibhīṣaṇa
traverse the city proper to where Rāvaṇi worships
Vaiśvānara in the temple of the Nikumbhilā
sacrifice. Pounce precipitately on that Rākṣasa,
as a tiger strikes, and destroy him. By my boon you two
will enter sight unseen; I shall sheath you in a veil of
māyā, like a sword inside its scabbard. Now go with a
stout heart, you of renown." That gem of champions bowed low to
the feet of Māyā, then proceeded in great haste to where
340 the best of Rāghavas awaited. Awake now, birds were
cooing in flower groves, like musicians at festivals,
who fill the land with propitious strains. Trees shed blossoms on
that best of champion's head; breezes blew in mellow murmurs.

"Your mother, Sumitrā, conceived you in her womb at a
most auspicious moment, Lakṣmaṇa!" came a message born

of the firmament. "Songs that praise your deeds will fill three worlds
this day, I proclaim! You, Saumitri, shall do that of which
the gods have been incapable! You shall be immortal,
like that clan of gods!" Sarasvati spoke no further, but
350 the birds cooed more melodiously in their pleasure grove.

That cooing went inside the happy home, that gold temple
where the Indra of warriors, hero Indrajit, reposed
upon his flower bed. To music from the forest grove
awoke that elephant of warriors. That Indra among
charioteers held Pramīlā's lotus hand in his, and
in a honeyed tone of voice, ah, goodness me, as when a
bee hums mysteries of love into a lotus blossom's
ear, he spoke (kissing her closed eyes affectionately). "The
birds, cooing, call you, my beauty, my golden Dawn. Open,
360 dearest one, your lotus eyes. Arise, my eternal bliss.
My wife, this heart of mine is like the sunstone, and you, a
picture of the sun—I, lackluster when you close your eyes.
You are the ultimate fruit upon the tree of fortune
in my world. The pupils of your eyes, priceless gems. Arise
and see, moon-faced one, how blossoms in that lovely arbor
bloomed with your stolen charms." Startled, that woman rose in a
hurry—as do those cow herdsmen's wives at the flute's lush sounds!

Demurely, she covered her figure out of modesty.

Again, the prince spoke with affection, "Finally dark Night
 370 recedes. Were that not so, would you have bloomed, my lotus; would
 these two eyes of mine have been consoled? Come, darling, let us
 offer our obeisance before my mother's feet, then I
 shall take my leave. Later I shall proffer worship to god
 Vaiśvānara and gratify, by a hail of arrows
 like terrifying lightning, Rāma's wish for war with war."

They dressed, that daughter-in-law and son of Rāvaṇa—both
 unequalled in this world: Pramīlā, the finest among
 females, and hero Meghanāda, the finest of the
 males! The pair emerged from their bedchamber—like the morning
 380 star accompanied by the newly risen sun. Ashamed, pale-
 countenanced fireflies faded away (no longer sipping
 the elixir-dew off flower petals). Bees darted back
 and forth, in hopes of nectar; upon a tree limb sang a
 cuckoo his honeyed, fifth-note song.² Rākṣasas' melodic
 instruments resounded; guardsmen bowed; cries of "Victory
 to Meghanāda" rose into the skies! Joyously the
 couple took their seat inside their jeweled palanquin, which
 conveyance bearers bore to queen Mandodarī's golden
 quarters. It was an edifice from which emanated
 390 splendor—embossed with emeralds, diamonds, ivory—unmatched in
 all the world. Whatever was eye-pleasing that Providence

created shone in or round about those quarters. Before
 the door paced sentry maids, *praharaṇas* in their hands like
 Death's very scepter. Some were on horseback, some on foot. All
 about sparked rows of stellar lamps. Vernal breezes wafted,
 bearing fragrances from groves of myriad flowers. Soft
 sounds of the *vīṇā* billowed forth, like some enchanting dream.

400 Into such a golden dwelling went the conqueror of foes
 with gorgeous Pramīlā whose face seemed like the moon. A
 certain Rākṣasī by the name of Trijaṭā came on
 the run. Said the lion among warriors, "Listen, my good
 Trijaṭā, upon completion of the Nikumbhilā
 sacrifice, I, according to my father's order, shall
 fight Rāma, shall destroy the enemies of Rākṣasas;
 and so, I wish to worship now my mother's feet. Go, with
 this message. Say, 'Your son and daughter-in-law are waiting
 at the doorway, O queen of Laṅkā.'" Prostrating herself
 humbly, Trijaṭā (the horrid Rākṣasī) said to that
 champion, "Prince, queen Mandodarī presently is in the
 410 Śiva temple. For your well-being she worships Umā's
 spouse, forgoing food and sleep. Who in this world, champion, has
 a son like you? And who has such a mother?" So saying,
 that messengeress fast departed, showing lightning's speed.

A troupe of female eulogists, to accompaniment from

instruments, sang out, "O Kṛttikā, O Haimavatī,
 come see your Śaktidhara, your Kārttikeya, waiting
 at your door with bright-eyed Senā. Come gaze with joy upon
 your daughter-in-law, who even puts Rohiṇī to shame,
 and your son, whose good looks force the moon to admit he is
 420 but stained. You lucky woman, you! Hero Indrajit, world-
 conquering champion—pretty Pramīlā, chaste world-charmer!"

The queen of Laṅkā exited the Śiva temple, where-
 upon the couple bowed before her feet. Ecstatic, the
 queen drew them both close to her, kissed the tops of their heads, then
 wept. Goodness me, a mother's heart—in this world it is in
 you that love is stored, just as flowers are the storehouse of
 aromas, and oysters, pearls' containers, those gem-filled mines.

An autumn moon of a son, a daughter-in-law who is
 autumnal moonlight, and the queen of the Rākṣasa clan
 430 herself the very essence of star-crowned Night—streams of dew-
 tears fell upon her leaf-cheeks, making them more beautiful.

Said the Indra among warriors, "Your ladyship, bless this
 thrall of ours. Once the Nikumbhilā sacrifice has been
 properly completed, I shall go to battle on this
 very day and vanquish Rāghava. That scoundrel slew my
 baby brother, Virabāhu. I want to see by what
 power he can stop me. Give me, Mother, your foot-dust. With

your blessings I today shall free Laṅkā from this danger
 with volleys of keen arrows. I shall shackle, then haul back
 440 that traitor, Uncle Vibhīṣaṇa! shall plunge Sugrīva
 and Aṅgada beneath the sea's unfathomed waters!" The
 queen replied, wiping tears with the gemmed end of her sari—

"How can I bid farewell to you, my child? To the dark sky
 of my heart, you are the full moon. That heroic spouse of
 Sītā is in battle dauntless; the champion Lakṣmaṇa
 is overpowering; Vibhīṣaṇa, compassionless,
 acts like a deadly serpent. Intoxicated on the
 wine of greed, an idiot can kill with ease his own, just
 as a tiger racked by hunger kills and eats his cubs. I
 450 tell you, it was at an inauspicious time, child, that my
 husband's mother, Nikaṣā, conceived vile Vibhīṣaṇa
 in her womb. That venal one has wrecked our golden Laṅkā."

Smiling, the charioteer answered to his mother, "Why,
 Mother, do you fear that Rāghava and Lakṣmaṇa, those
 enemies of Rākṣasas? Twice on father's order I
 overcame them both in hard-fought combat, with volleys of
 flaming arrows. By the grace of your two feet this humble
 servant has always proved victorious in warfare with
 gods, Daityas, and the men. Uncle Vibhīṣaṇa knows, your
 460 ladyship, the prowess of your son; so do the god clan's

charioteers, lightning-flinging Sahasrākṣa foremost
of their lot; likewise does the Indra among Nāgas in
Pātāla; and so the Indra among mortals on this
earth. Why, tell me Mother, do you fear for me today? That
Rāma is beneath contempt! Why should you, pray tell, fear him?"

The queen, with warm affection, kissed his head and said, "He is
a man with a wizard's powers, my child, this husband of
Vaidehī, or else he is assisted by the whole god
clan. When you bound them both with *nāgapāśas*, who was it
470 who then loosed those bonds? Who saved them, in a fight at night, when
you shackled Rāghava and all his forces? All this I
fail to comprehend. I have heard tell that when Maithilī's
lord so orders, stones float on water, fires die, and rains pour
down! A man of wizardry, this Rāma! How, my dearest
child, can I bid you leave to vie with him again? Alas,
Fate, why oh why did star-crossed Sūrpaṅkhā not wither
in her mother's womb!" So saying, the queen wept silently.

Said the elephant of warriors, "By dwelling on events
gone by, you lament now, Mother, for no good reason. Our
480 enemies are at the city's gates. How could I relax
until I crush them in pitched battle? When Hutāśana
attacks a house, who is there who stays asleep inside? The
Rākṣasa clan, famed, feared in all three worlds by gods, Daityas,

and men alike, should I—your ladyship, O Mother—should
 I, Indrajit, the son of Rāvaṇa, let Rāghava
 inflict infamy upon our clan? My grandfather, your
 father, Maya, an Indra among Danu's scions—what
 would he say if he learned of this? What of all my uncles,
 your charioteer brothers? The entire universe
 490 would laugh! Command your humble thrall. I shall go do battle,
 Mother, shall destroy that Rāghava! Just listen: birds are
 cooing in the garden. The sun's foe yields. I must worship
 my deity of choice and then, with a contingent of
 Rākṣasas most difficult to overcome, I shall join
 the fight. Return now, madam, to your residence. Soon I,
 victorious in combat, shall be back and with fervor
 worship at your pair of lotus feet! Father's permission
 I have gained—now please give me yours. Who can contend with your
 slave, your ladyship, once you have yielded him your blessings?"

500 Then wiping tears away with the jeweled free end of her
 sari, the queen of Laṅkā answered, "If you have to go,
 my dear—may Virūpākṣa, guardian of Rākṣasas,
 guard you in this deadly conflict. This I beg at his two
 feet. What more can I say? You desert me in this room now
 void of my affections' fancy." The queen cried as she spoke,
 but glanced toward Pramīlā. "Stay with me, little mother; I

soothe my wretched heart gazing at your moon-like face. Mother
earth during Moon's dark fortnight is cheered by beams of starlight."

510 That one of strong limbs bowed before his mother's feet, then took
his leave. Weeping, the royal consort with her son's wife went
again to her quarters. Shunning his palanquin, the prince
walked the path leading to the woods— with determination
that best of charioteers strode on down the flowered path-
way to the entrance of the temple of the sacrifice.

Suddenly, from behind, there came the sound of ankle bells.
Ever recognizable, ah yes, to a lover's ears
are the sounds his woman's footsteps make. That Indra among
warriors smiled, embracing rapturously in the confines
of his arms that lotus-face, that Pramīlā. "Alas, my
520 lord," said the pretty one, "I had planned on going with you
to the temple and outfitting you in your warrior's garb.
But what was I to do? Mother-in-law would have me take
refuge in her home. Yet I, however, could not stay there,
without gazing once again upon your feet. I have heard
that even just a sliver of the moon shines bright from the
brilliance of the sun; so is it with this slave of yours, O
sun among the Rākṣasa clan! Without you, I swear, the
world is gloom, my lord!" Then onto her pearl-studded breast, her
eyes rained pearls of even greater radiance. Compared to

530 those, what worthless things are dewdrops upon lotus petals?

Responded the finest of warriors, "I shall soon return,
after overcoming Rāghava in battle, O my
Laṅkā-beautifier. Go back, my darling, to our queen
of Laṅkā. Rohiṇī, chaste wife of mine, rises prior
to the moon! Did Fate create, faithful wife, those lotus eyes
to cry? Why, my pet, have storm clouds gathered in those vaults of
light? Give your consent, beautiful one—just look, Night, tipsy
on the liquor of delusion, has fled quickly, thinking
you to be Dawn—grant me permission, most chaste woman, that
540 I might carry on, to the temple of the sacrifice."

As when the champion Kusumeṣu, on Indra's orders,
left his Rati and set off that fateful moment to break
Śiva's meditation; just so, alas, set off then this
Kandarpa-like hero Indrajit, leaving his pure wife
Pramīlā, the epitome of Rati. At a most
ill-fated time Madana embarked upon his journey;
at an equally ill-fated moment set off hero
Meghanāda—the hope of the Rākṣasa clan, in all
the world invincible! Ah, the march of destiny, who
550 has the power to impede its progress? As Rati once
lamented, so too, presently, did youthful Pramīlā.

All this time the Rākṣasa wife had been brushing back her

tears. She stared in the direction of her husband some ways
off and spoke in a mellifluous voice, "I know why you
roam dense forests, O king of elephants. Once you have seen
that gait of his, how could you, shameless, show your face again,
vain one? Who would say your waist is slender, lion, once his
eyes have seen the beast with yellow eyes amidst our clan of
Rākṣasa? That is also why you remain forever
560 exiled to the forest. You may slay the elephant, but
this lion of a warrior with his awesome bludgeon has
subdued in battle Vāsava, eternal enemy
of the clan of Daityas and sovereign of the clan of gods."

With this, that chaste wife, her hands together in a sign of
supplication, gazing toward the sky, still weeping, prayed, "This
Pramīlā, your humble slave, O daughter of the Indra
among mountains, beseeches you. Cast your glance of mercy,
maid of mercy, upon Laṅkā. Protect him, the greatest
of the Rākṣasas, in this struggle. Clothe that champion in
570 impregnable armor. I, a vine, supported always
by you, Satī, this vine's life depends upon that kingly
tree. Please see to it, Mother, that no battle-ax befalls
him. What more can your servant say? You are Antaryāmī.
But for you, O Jagadambā, who is there to save him?"

As breezes waft a wealth of fragrance into the quarters

of the king, just so the voice-bearing firmament bore those
prayers of Pramīlā to the residence on Kailāsa.

Indra trembled fearfully. Observing this, the sovereign
of the winds, with a zephyr's speed, floated them away. That

580 chaste wife, wiping her teary eyes, turned back—as cowherd wives,
about to lose their lover, bid good-bye to Mādhava
on the Yamunā's shores, and empty-hearted return to
empty houses, so, weeping still, that woman went back home.

Thus ends canto number five,

called "preparations,"

in the poem

The Slaying of Meghanāda