

The sun set, and Twilight appeared—a gem upon her brow.
 Night-blooming lotuses now blossomed; in ponds the wan-faced
 lotuses of day closed fast their eyes; warbling birds returned
 to nests; and cattle, lowing, shambled toward their cow sheds. With
 the moon and her radiant stars came Night, smiling. Flirting,
 fragrant breezes, blustering about—to all they whispered
 sweetly, "What riches did you win kissing which of several
 flowers?" The goddess Sleep arrived. And, as tired children
 curl up in their mother's lap, just so the many creatures
 10 of land and sea took refuge at that goddess' two feet.

The moon's beloved constellations spread throughout the gods'
 abode. Amidst the divine assembly sat the sovereign
 of gods, on a gold throne—to his left, Puloma's sloe-eyed
 goddess daughter. A silver parasol, bright with gems, shone
 brilliantly from above that Indra of divinities.

Handling with skill the jewel-studded yak-tail whisks, the fly-
 whisk bearers fanned to and fro. Fresh breezes emanated,
 gaily wafting honeyed scents from Nandana garden. All
 around rang out celestial music. Six *rāgas*, with their
 20 thirty-six accompanying *rāginīs*, advanced and started
 playing. Urvaśī, Rambhā with the captivating smile,
 Citralekhā, and sleek-haired Miśrakesī danced, charming
 with their jingling anklet bells the hearts of a host of gods!

Gandharvas served in golden vessels nectar; others, the food of the divines. Some bore saffron, musk, and vermilion; some, the paste of sandalwood; others still, carried garlands strung with fragrant *mandāra* blossoms. In Vaijayanta, Vāsava was joyous with his heavenly entourage.

At such a time appeared the Rākṣasas' Rājalakṣmī,

30 lighting up that godly city with her beauty's brilliance.

Courteously, the spouse of Śacī bowed to Ramā's feet.

Blessing him, then sitting on his golden throne, the one with lotus eyes, who dwells in Puṇḍarikākṣa's heart, spoke, "King of divines, pay heed to why I come today to your court."

Responded Indra, "O daughter of the Indra among waters, beguiler of the universe, those two red feet of yours, Mother, are longed for by this universe. He on whom you mercifully cast your gaze of mercy, mercy-mistress, his life in this life is indeed fulfilled. By what merit from a former birth has this slave of yours obtained
40 that joy? Do explain this to your humble minion, Mother."

Ramā spoke again, "For some time now, treasure of divines, I have lived in golden Laṅkā. The king of Rākṣasas worships me. But, alas, finally Fate has turned against him. Due to his own fault, that sinner puts an end to his own lineage. Even then, my lord, I am not able to

forsake him. Can one who is a captive flee, Indra of
the gods, if the prison doors remain unopened?

As long as Rāvaṇa lives, I shall be confined within his house.

50 That son of Rāvaṇa, whose name is Meghanāda, you
know him well, O conqueror of Vṛtra, he is now the
one and only warrior left in Laṅkā. The rest of them
were slain in combat. That champion, a mighty lion,
will attack tomorrow Rāmacandra. Yet once again
Daśānana has appointed him commander. You must
consider well how to protect that Rāghava, so dear
to all the god clan. I tell you—were proud Meghanāda
at Nikumbhilā to complete his sacrifice before
the time he enters combat, the husband of Vaidehī
60 would find himself in trouble. Mandodari's son would be
invincible throughout the world, O Indra of divines!
As Vainateya is supreme in strength among the birds,
so that gem of warriors is foremost of the Rākṣasas!"

So saying, Ramā, Keśava's desire, fell silent, ah
me! as the *vīṇā* pauses after entertaining hearts
with melodies! The six *rāgas*, thirty-six *rāgiṇīs*,
and such, on hearing Kamalā's sweet speech, forgot to do
what they do naturally, as in springtime other birds just
sit and listen to the cuckoo's call in a flower grove.

70 Then spoke that lord of the sky, "From this grave peril, Mother,
 who but Viśvanātha can rescue Rāghava? The son
 of Rāvaṇa is difficult to best in battle. I
 fear him more, much more, than serpents fear the serpent-eater!¹
 This very thunderbolt, the one which pulverized the skull
 of Vṛtra, the Asura, was repulsed by weapons that
 great hero wielded. Hence, worldwide they call him Indrajit.
 By a boon from Sarvasūci, that best of warriors has
 become all-conquering. Command your thrall that I might go
 with due dispatch to his residence on Mount Kailāsa."

80 Spoke the beloved of Upendra, that daughter of the
 Indra among waters, "Go, then, lord of the divines, with
 haste. Humbly narrate, god, these tidings at the feet of him
 who wears the moon, there upon the summit of Kailāsa.
 Tell him that chaste mother earth cries constantly, unable
 to withstand the burden. Tell him that Ananta now is
 weary. If the king of Rākṣasas is not uprooted,
 the earth will sink to Rasātala! Virūpākṣa is
 quite fond of Lakṣmī. Please let him know that she, forsaking
 Vaikuṅṭha, has lived for many days in Laṅkā! She thinks
 90 of him constantly in that lonely place, but is it that
 he finds some fault with her for which he does not think of her
 a whit? What father keeps his daughter from her husband's house—

ask that of learned Jaṭādhara! If you fail to meet

Tryambaka, tell all before the feet of Ambikā."

And saying such, that moon-faced love of Hari said good-bye,
rose, and left. Through the sky the sleek-haired love of Keśava
descended, as gold idols sink in lucid waters, bright,
from beneath the water's surface due to innate brilliance.

100 Mātali fetched the chariot. Śacī's husband gazed at
Śacī, speaking very sweetly, "Come along, my goddess,
come with me. When winds are laced with scented nectar, he is
twice as cordial. Mark this, wife, the beauty of a lotus
rests within the nature of its fully blossomed flower."

At her loved one's words, that woman well-endowed with hips smiled
and, taking her husband's hand, stepped onto the chariot.

110 That chariot approached with speed heaven's golden doors, which
opened of their own accord with pleasing sounds. Exiting
in haste, that divine conveyance shone splendidly against
the sky. With a start, the world awoke thinking that the sun
had climbed the rising-hill. *Phīṅgā* birds chirped; other feathered
creatures filled forest groves with morning's song. In their bridal
chambers bashful brides left flower-beds and set to housework.

Near Lake Mānasa beamed brilliantly the lustrous peak of
Mount Kailāsa. Upon its tip sat Bhava's home, like the
peacock-crown on the head of Mādhava. That wondrous blue-

black bodied mountain was arrayed with clumps of golden blooms,
 ah me! as though a yellow *dhuti*! Waters gushed from springs—
 as if that body were anointed with white sandal paste!

120 Stepping from his chariot to the footpath, that monarch
 of the skies, with his queen of the skies, entered the bliss-filled
 abode. There sat Īśvarī, the queen of queens, upon her
 golden throne. Vijayā waved a fly-whisk. Jayā held the
 royal parasol. Alas, the opulence of Bhava's
 residence—how can the poet convey it? Contemplate,
 gaze upon it in your mind's eye, all you thoughtful people.

With utmost reverence, great Indra and Indrāṇī bowed
 before the feet of Śakti. Ambikā blessed them, then asked—
 "Speak the good news, god—both of you, what brings you here today?"

130 The hurler of the thunderbolts, palms pressed together, spoke,
 "What is there in this universe, Mother, of which you are
 unaware? Laṅkā's sovereign, hostile to the gods, worried
 now by the war, has once again today installed his son
 Meghanāda to the post of general. Tomorrow
 at dawn that enemy-harassing prince will engage in
 battle, after worshipping his chosen deity and
 getting from him coveted boons. His prowess, Mother, is
 no secret. Rājalakṣmī of the Rākṣasa clan came
 to Vaijyanta and so informed this slave of yours, O

Bhagavati. The love of Hari said chaste mother earth
 140 cries out, no longer able to withstand that awful weight;
 Śeṣa, upholder of the universe, is weary; and
 even she herself, the fickle one, is these days ever
 anxious to exit golden Laṅkā city. That goddess
 directed me, your servant, to narrate humbly at your
 feet these tidings, Annadā. The jewel of the Raghu
 clan is a hero favored by the gods. Yet what warrior
 in the god clan would dare fight Rāvaṇi upon the field
 of battle? That Rākṣasa, Indrajit by name, renowned
 throughout the world, renders lusterless in combat, Mother,
 150 the universe-destroying thunderbolt! Consider by
 what means, O Kātyāyanī, you can save Rāghava.
 If you do not bestow him mercy, then, come tomorrow,
 overwhelming Rāvaṇi will void this world of Rāma!"

Answered Kātyāyanī, "Naikaṣeya is the finest
 among Śiva's worshipers—Trisūlī feels most kindly
 toward him. O Indra of divines, can it be that harm to
 him could ever come from me! Tāpasendra is absorbed
 in meditation now, and thus, O god, is Laṅkā such."

With hands cupped most reverently, Vāsava spoke yet again,
 160 "That sovereign of the Nisācaras, that worst offender
 against *dharma* is an adversary of the gods! Think

of this, O daughter of the Indra among mountains. Is
 it ever proper, Mother, to extend your mercy to
 that wicked one who steals treasures from the poor? Well-mannered
 Rāghava forsook his joy and comfort to uphold his
 father's solemn vow and in a beggar's garb entered the
 deep forest. He had but one priceless gem. Of how he cared
 for her, what more can your humble servant say? The vile one
 spread illusion's net, then stole that gem! Alas, Mother, when
 170 I reflect on that, my heart fumes in flames of anger! With
 his boon from Trisūlī, that Rākṣasa warrior now turns
 disdainful of the gods! and greedy for another's wealth,
 another's wife—that ever-avaricious, lowly thing!
 Yet then, because of what (I fail to understand), do you
 grant sympathy to such a fool, compassion-giving one?"

That monarch of the skies fell mute. The queen consort of the
 skies, whose speech is like the music of a *vīṇā*, began
 to speak in dulcet tones, "Whose heart would not be rent, goddess,
 by the sorrows of Vaidehī? She sits day and night in
 180 the Aśoka grove (like a forest bird now kept encaged)
 and in grief that beauty mourns. It is no secret to those
 reddened feet of yours, O Mother, what heartaches the moon-faced
 one endures without her husband. If you fail to wield the
 staff of punishment, O goddess, who will discipline this

dharma-spurning lord of Rākṣasas? Once you overcome

Meghanāda, return Vaidehī to Vaidehī's joy.

Wipe away your servant's blemish, Śaśāṅkadhāriṇī!

For I die of shame, Mother, when I hear from people that
a Rākṣasa downed in war the monarch of the heavens."

190 Smiling, Umā spoke, "You detest Rāvaṇa, O Jīṣṇu.

And you, Śacī, who surpass them all in loveliness, are

eager for Indrajit's demise. Both of you implore

me to demolish golden Laṅkā. It is not within

my power to effect such a feat. The Rākṣasa host

is by Virūpākṣa given shelter. Except for him,

Vāsava, who in the world, tell me please, can fulfill this

wish of yours? Immersed in yogic meditation, O king

of gods, is Vṛṣadhvaja. That Indra among yogis

sits in solitude upon the awesome, cloud-draped mountain

200 known as Yogāsana. How could one approach him there where

Garuḍa, Indra among birds, is powerless to fly?"

That son of Aditi spoke with humility, "Whose might

except for yours, O Jagadambā, grantor of release,

approaches Bhairava's, the foe of Tripura? Goddess,

lay waste the clan of Rākṣasas and thereby salvage all

three worlds; enhance Dharma's glory; lighten the burden for

mother earth; and rescue Rāghava." In such a manner

the adversary of the Daitya clan flattered Satī.

210 Suddenly that city filled with a rare fragrance; sounds of
bells and conch shells could be heard all around, accompanied
by auspicious jingling, soft and sweet, as when the cuckoos
sing harmoniously in some distant wooded grove. Her
golden throne tottered. In honeyed tones that ideal wife of
Bhaveśa asked her friend Vijayā, "Little moon-face, tell
me, where, why, and who worships me at this untimely time?"²

220 First she chanted *mantras*, then jotted down some figures with
a piece of chalk, computing calculations, and at last
with a smile that confidante reported, "O daughter of
the mountains, the charioteer Dāśarathi worships
you in Laṅkā. I deduce, by my computations, that
the Raghu sovereign, hands cupped in supplication, offers
blue lotuses before a water pot on which those two
pretty feet of yours are painted out of bright vermilion.
Confer to him the gift of *abhaya*, O Abhayā.
That finest Raghu, son of Kauśalyā, is your foremost
devotee. Deliver him from danger, O Tāriṇī!"

230 Satī, queen of queens, arose from her golden throne and once
again addressed Vijayā, "Vijayā, do attend this
godly couple properly. I shall proceed to where sits
Dhūrjaṭi on Mount Yogāsana (that huge mountain peak!)."

And saying this, Durgā, she who moves with elephantine
grace, went inside her golden dwelling. Then the beautiful
Vijayā spoke warmly to Vāsava, Indra of the
gods, together with his heavenly queen, and seated them
upon the golden throne. With utmost satisfaction the
couple partook of the offerings made to them. Jayā,
laughing, hung a string of star-shaped flowers round Śacī's neck;
she placed upon her hair bun an ever-tasteful, ever-
blooming spray of gem-like blossoms. Instrumental music
240 sounded all about, and a troupe of women sang and danced.
Kailāsa city was entranced, as were all three worlds! When
babies heard the honeyed sounds within their dreams, they smiled, eyes
closed, upon their mother's lap. And sleepless, love-sick maidens
rose aflutter, thinking they had heard their lovers' footfalls
at the door. Cuckoos ceased their songs throughout the forest. And
a band of yogis started, thinking that their chosen god,
from whom they begged a boon, had indeed appeared before them.

When she had slipped into her golden dwelling, that perfect
wife of Bhaveśa reflected, "How can I call upon
250 Bhaveśa today?" Then, mulling over that a moment,
Sati's thoughts turned to Rati. Umā's wishes instantly
wafted, in the form of ripples of a fragrant breeze, to
where charming Varānanā, enchantress of Manmatha,

dallied with Manmatha in a pleasure garden. Rati's
 heart danced like *vīṇā* strings at a finger's touch. Straight away
 went that bride of Kāma, hastily, upon the wind's path
 to the peak of Mount Kailāsa. Just as, at the end of
 nighttime, lotuses lay themselves wide open on a lake,
 bowing at the feet of Dawn, harbinger of light's sovereign,
 260 so bowed that love of Madana at the feet of Hara's
 darling. Giving Rati her blessings, Ambikā smiled and
 said, "That Indra among yogis is immersed in austere
 meditation on Mount Yogāsana. Tell me, moon-faced
 one, how, by what enticement, can I break his trance?" Bowing
 once again, that sleek-haired one replied, "Goddess, you should
 assume a most enchanting form. If you so order me,
 I shall fetch you divers garments and adorn your sterling
 body. As soon as he lays eyes on you, Pinākī will
 be enticed, exactly as the sovereign of the seasons
 270 was tempted when he caught sight of the forest, flower-tressed."

So saying, Rati smoothed her hair with aromatic oils,
 then plaited it into a captivating braid. Next, that
 lovely one assembled sundry ornaments, embossed with
 diamonds, pearls, and such. She brought with her paste of sandalwood,
 vermilion mixed with saffron, musk, also silken garments
 glittering with many jewels. That one with charming eyes

in delight outlined both feet with red lac dye. That daughter
of the Indra among mountains looked the very image
of a world-enchanted. She glowed with twice the splendor of
280 lustrous gold when rubbed upon a buffing stone. Within a
looking glass the goddess saw that moon-like face of hers, as
the full-bloomed lotus sees its full-blown charm in pellucid
waters. With a smile, the darling of the victor over
Smara spoke, gazing toward the love of Smara, "Summon up
the monarch of your life." At once that love of Madana
called (as the queen among cuckoos calls to Springtime) to her
Madana. Phuladhanu hurried there, as those who live
abroad come eagerly at the strains of their own music.

Said that daughter of the stones, "Come with me, Manmatha. We
290 shall go to where the sovereign among the yogis sits,
entirely absorbed in yoga. Come at once, my child."

Prostrate at Abhayā's feet, blissful Madana, offspring
of infatuation, answered worriedly, "Why do you,
goddess, give your servant such an order? I am scared
to death, Mother, as I recall that past event! When due
to foolish Dakṣa's blunder, Satī, you abandoned your
corporeal form and, on your own, took birth within the
home of Himādri—it was then that Viśvanātha, out
of grief from loss of you, gave up responsibility

300 for the universe and commenced to meditate. Later,
 Indra, sovereign of the gods, directed me, your servant
 to disturb that meditation. At a quite ill-fated
 moment I went, Mother, to where god Vāma was immersed
 in austere meditation. I seized my flower-bow and
 let fly a flower-arrow at that most inopportune
 of times. As a lion without warning springs upon the
 king of elephants, there filling up the forests with his
 terrifying roar, O Bhavēśvarī, just so the sun
 whose home is situated in the forehead of your spouse,
 310 sprang forth in anger and consumed this slave of yours. Alas,
 Mother, how can I ever, humbly, tell those reddened feet
 of yours what burning pain I endured? With forlorn wails I
 called to Vāsava, the moon, the winds, and sun; but no one
 came. In no time whatsoever I was turned to ashes!
 With much trepidation and without enthusiasm,
 I think of Bhavēśa—please forgive this slave of yours, O
 Kṣemaṅkarī. At your feet I modestly beseech you."

Śaṅkarī spoke with a smile, consoling Madana, "Come
 along with me in best of spirits and be brave at heart,
 320 Anaṅga. By my boon you shall be all-victorious!
 The fire who had seized you at that inauspicious moment,
 consuming you in his flames, will do today your bidding,

just as the deadly poisons take on the qualities of
 medicine, thus saving lives when they are handled wisely."

Then with hands pressed palm to palm and bowing before Umā's
 feet, Kāma said, "What has he to fear in all three worlds, O
 Abhayā, to whom you grant *abhaya*? But may I say
 this to your lotus feet—how, O daughter of the Indra
 among mountains, will you venture out from this abode in
 330 such enchanting garb—do tell this slave of yours. In a flash,
 Mother, the world will go insane gazing at your graceful
 sweetness—I tell you in all honesty. This well-meant act,
 O goddess, will quickly yield contrary ends. When the gods
 and Asuras churned the lord of waters and produced the
 drink of immortality, the most mischievous sons of
 Diti quarreled with the gods for that sweet nectar. Śrī's spouse
 arrived upon the scene disguised as Mohinī, a most
 exquisitely enchanting woman. When the three worlds saw
 Hṛṣīkeśa in disguise, they swooned, struck by one of this
 340 slave's darts! Gods and Daityas both forgot about the nectar
 of immortal life. Nāgas bowed ashamed, seeing down her
 back her braid; Mount Mandara himself turned motionless at
 seeing her high breasts! Remembering all that, O Satī,
 a smile comes to my lips. If copper gilded with a film
 of gold is dazzling, then consider, goddess, how more awe-

inspiring is the luster of pure gold!" Without delay,
 mystifying Ambikā conjured up a golden cloud
 and with it veiled her charming figure. It was, alas, as
 though a lotus bloom could cloak its moon-like countenance with
 350 sunset's glow! or, as though in heaps of ashes flames could hide,
 suppressing their bright grins! or, as though god Śakra, with a
cakra, could mask the wealth of nectar in the lunar orb!

Through a door inlaid with ivory that sweetest smiling
 one stepped from her home, like Dawn herself overcast by clouds.
 With her was Manmatha, flower-bow in hand, upon his
 back a quiver that was packed with keenest flower-arrows—
 and she, a lotus, seemed to bloom upon those thorny stalks.

On the very peak of Mount Kailāsa is an awesome
 plateau summit called Yogāsana, renowned throughout the
 360 world; it was to there the world-enchanting goddess mounted,
 mounted on the king of pachyderms. At once surrounding
 caverns closed—crashing, roaring mountain streams fell as silent
 as the lord of waters when in peaceful, calm confluence.
 The clouds fled far away as does darkness faced with Dawn's
 bright laugh. The goddess saw in front of her the ascetic
 Kapardī, body smeared with ashes, his eyes shut, drowned in
 austere meditation's sea, deadened to the outer world.

To Madana that lady with the most delightful smile

spoke, "What is the point of hesitating, enemy of
370 Śambara? Shoot your flower-arrows." At the goddess'
command, Mīnadhvaja knelt upon one knee, then twanged his
bowstring piercing Umā's husband with infatuating
arrows. A thrill shot through Śūlapāṇi. The matted mass
of hair upon his head shook, as, when there is an earthquake,
a stand of trees upon a mountain top will shake, snapping
and cracking. His lordship began to stare! Flames roared from his
forehead, flashing, blazing bright! Seized by fear, Phuladhanu
took refuge in the breast of Bhavānī, as a frightened
lion cub hides when clouds with thunderclaps and lightning streaks
380 disgorge, as spirited as doomsday fires, dazzling to the
eye. Now, opening his seeing eyes, Dhūrjaṭi arose.
The daughter of the rocks then shed her conjured veil of clouds.

Charmed by a beauty like Mohini's, that master of all
animals spoke excitedly, "Why do I see you here
alone in this deserted spot, mother of Gaṇendra?
Where is, O Śaṅkarī, your mount, the Indra among beasts?
where are Jayā and Vijayā?" Smiling, Umā of the
most alluring smile replied, "Indra among yogis, you
had forgotten me, your humble servant, and stayed in this
390 forsaken place so long. That is why I come, my husband,
in hopes of seeing your two feet. Does a wife who loves her

husband go escorted by attendants when she greets him?
 At dawn, my lord, does not the *cakravāki* bird proceed
 alone to where her heart's mate waits." Affectionately, god
 Īśāna, a trace of joy on his lips, gave Īśānī
 a seat upon his deerskin. All about, buds burst open
 into bloom; bees, now maddened with a thirst for honey, swarmed;
 vernal, southern breezes blew; cuckoos cooed; and a rain of
 blown blossoms cleansed by nighttime dew clothed that best of mountain
 400 peaks. In Umā's bosom Kusumeṣu (what more fitting
 dwelling place than this for Manasija) sat there strumming
 merrily on his flower bow, letting fly a hail of
 arrows—by love's scents was Trisūli made mad! Overcome
 by utter shame, Rāhu rushed forth, gobbled up the beaming
 moon, while the smiling solar god hid within the ashes!

Then taking on the guise of Mohana, to captivate
 his Mohinī, that god spoke, smiling, "I know, my goddess,
 all your inner thoughts—why Vāsava has come with Śacī
 to our Kailāsa home and for what cause the jewel of
 410 Raghus worshipped you at this untimely time. The son of
 Nikaṣā is my greatest devotee, but that foolish
 fellow is undone by the fruits of his own deed. My heart
 aches just to think about him, Maheśvarī! Alas, my
 goddess, what can you give that human being, where will you

find the strength to block what is predestined from another
 birth? O Umā, send Kāma to the Indra of the gods.
 Direct him to proceed at once, my Mahesī, to the
 residence of goddess Māyā. By the grace of Māyā,
 hero Lakṣmaṇa will slay the hero Meghanāda."

420 Mīnadhvaja set off, as the king of birds departs his
 nest and flies away, gazing back repeatedly toward his
 happy home. Fluffy clouds, golden color, wafting scented
 fragrances and raining flower blossoms—lotuses, both
 red and white, jasmine, *seṃuti*, *jāti*, *pārijāta*,
 and so forth, all beloved by gentle breezes—engulfed the
 god of gods, that greatest god, there with the greatest goddess.

 By the golden door, inlaid with ivory, there awaits
 the moon-faced charmer of that Madana, tears in her eyes,
 aha! separated from her husband! It was then the
 430 companion of the spring reappeared. Not hesitating,
 Manmatha joyously stretched out his arms and drew his spouse
 in fond embrace to him, placating her with caring words.
 Her teardrops dried, as do the dewdrops on lotus petals
 when the sun shows himself upon the sunrise pinnacle.
 Regaining her heart's treasure, that richly handsome woman,
 her face to his (like the myna to the parrot during
 luscious springtime) spoke very loving words, "You have saved your

servant's life by coming back so soon to her, O joy of
Rati! Whom shall I tell how I worried? I cannot stop
440 trembling, husband, when I hear the name of godly Vāma
and recall those past events! that overwhelming, spiteful
Śūlapāṇi! Do not venture near him any more, swear
to me, O lord of my existence!" With a honeyed smile
Pañcaśara answered, "In a shady grove, who fears the
solar rays, my beauty. Let us greet the god clan's sovereign."

Manmatha reached where Vāsava was seated on his throne
of gold and, bowing low, relayed the message. Embarking
on his chariot, the charioteer monarch of the
gods sped off to Māyā's dwelling. His spirited steed flew
450 through the sky, the fly-whisk plume upon its head unswerving;
those chariot wheels rumbled, churning clouds along their path.

In due time, the hero Sahasrākṣa reached the place where
Māyā dwelt. Dismounting from his splendid chariot, that
foremost charioteer among divines stepped within the
temple. Who can ever put in words all of what that god
saw there? There sat the magic queen of Śaktis on a seat
of gold, radiant with added splendor from the sharpest
rays from the sun. With his palms pressed together, Vāsava
bowed most reverently and said, "Give this slave of yours your
460 benedictions, O great enchantress of the universe."

Upon vouchsafing him those benedictions, the goddess
asked, "Tell me what has brought you here today, Aditi's son?"

Replied the sovereign of the gods, "At Śiva's orders, O
grand Māyā, I have come to your abode. Inform his slave
of yours how, by what strategy, can Saumitri on the
morrow vanquish Daśānana's son? By your grace (so says
Virūpākṣa) the warrior Lakṣmaṇa will overcome
that champion Meghanāda in ferocious combat."

The goddess thought a moment, then replied to Vāsava,
470 "When Tāraka, the Asura, indomitable, laid
claim to heaven by repulsing you in battle, sovereign
of divines, at such a time that general, the favored
of the Kṛttikās, was conceived within Pārvatī's womb.³
To slay the Dānava king, Vṛṣabhadhvaja armed this
warrior personally, forging weapons of tremendous strength.
Observe this shield embossed with gold, and that sword, god, itself
a god of death incarnate, lying sheathed over there. Look,
Sunāsira, that awesome quiver, inexhaustible,
replete with arrows the likes of venomous serpents, hoods
480 flared. Gaze, god, upon the bow." Staring at the beauty of
that bow, Śacī's valiant husband smiled and said, "How worthless
is your humble servant's jeweled bow when matched with this. That
best of shields blazes, like the solar orb—dazzling eyes.

That sword shines with furious force, like a flame. Where within
this world, Mother, is another quiver such as that one?"

"Listen, god," resumed the goddess Māyā, "Ṣaḍānana
vanquished Tāraka by the power from those weapons. And
by the force of those same weapons, hero, Meghanāda
soon will die—I speak the truth. Yet not a warrior within
490 all three worlds, neither god nor human, can in a fair fight
slay Rāvaṇi. Send this weaponry to Rāma's younger
brother. I myself tomorrow shall proceed to Laṅkā
and there protect Lakṣmaṇa, god, in his battle with the
Rākṣasas. Go now to the land of the divines, treasure
of the godly host. When Dawn, the friend of flowers, opens
up the golden portals of the east tomorrow with her
lotus hand, that lion among Indras among warriors
will free you from your fear of Indrajit, constant dread of
yours—Laṅkā's lotus-sun will sink behind the setting-hill."

500 In ecstasy, the Indra of the gods praised that goddess,
gathered up the weapons, and then headed home to heaven.

The champion Vāsava took his seat upon the golden
throne within the gods' assembly hall and called on champion
Citraratha, "Bear these weapons carefully and go, great
hero, straight to golden Laṅkā. Saumitri the lion
will slay in combat Meghanāda come tomorrow by

the grace of Māyā. How that will happen, goddess Māyā
 will inform him. You tell Rāghava, O sovereign of the
 Gandharvas, that the denizens of heaven wish him well, that Hara's
 510 love, Pārvatī herself, was pleased with him today. Bestow
 upon him *abhaya*, high-minded one. If Rāvaṇi
 is killed in battle, Rāvaṇa is sure to perish too.
 And that jewel of the Raghu clan, Vaidehī's bliss, will
 again regain his chaste Vaidehī. Mount my chariot,
 O best of charioteers, and be on your way. Lest the
 Rākṣasas catch sight of you in Laṅkā and engage you
 in hostilities, I am ordering the clouds to veil
 the sky; I am summoning Prabhañjana and shall have
 him loose the winds a while. Then lightning will come out to dance;
 520 and I shall fill the world with swelling, rumbling thunderclaps."

Bowing humbly to the feet of the Indra among gods,
 the charioteer Citraratha gathered cautiously
 that weaponry and then proceeded to the mortal world.

The lord of gods called upon Prabhañjana and said, "Quick,
 raise a cataclysmic storm in Laṅkā city, sovereign
 of the winds; set free imprisoned gales at once; bring on the
 clouds; and quarrel somewhat raucously with the hostile lord
 of waters!" That god exuberant, just like a lion
 springing when his chains are broken, went to where the winds were

530 being held within the dark recesses of a mountain
cavern. From afar Pavana heard the loud and mindless
howling; he watched the mountain lurch from forces far inside
as though unable by its strength alone to hold in check
those mighty winds. By touch, the god pushed aside the stony
portal. With screams that menace, winds sped forth, as do waters
when embankments suddenly give way! Earth quaked; the ocean
roared! Rows of waves shaped like massive mountains tumbled, crashing
loudly, driven mad in combat with the winds! Clouds clamored
noisily as they scudded here, there. Lightning laughed, followed
540 by the crackling roar of thunder. The lord of stars, his stars
in tow, fled; all the while clouds surged over Laṅkā, belching
flames. Throughout the forest, timber snapped, toppling with a thud,
while violent storms whipped through the skies, streaming rain as if
to drown creation in Pralaya's deluge, dumping hail.

The Rākṣasas in panic dashed inside their homes. Amid
that camp, where stood the valiant Indra among Rāghavas,
came unannounced the charioteer Citraratha, like
the ray-ringed sun, a royal robe cloaked his figure! Round his
waist there shone an ornamental girdle with a mass of
550 brilliance like constellations of the zodiac— from it
hung the best of swords, brightly coruscating! How shall the
poet pen the golden glow from his godly quiver, bow,

shield, armor, lance, and coronet of sunbeams? That godly
shine bedazzled, and soon a scent from heaven filled the land.

Most respectfully that best of Raghus bowed before the
godly messenger, then asked, "Heavenly inhabitant,
what land but heaven, ah me, is adorned by such grandeur,
such grace? Why are you here today, forsaking Nandana
gardens—please tell your servant that. I have no throne of gold,
560 O god. What shall I offer as a seat? Yet if you, lord,
feel some compassion toward your slave, accept this water for
the washing of your feet, and take these presents, and kindly
sit upon this seat of *kuśa* grass. Rāghava, alas,
is but a beggar!" And blessing him, that charioteer
took a seat on the *kuśa* grass, then spoke in sweetest tones,

"My name is Citraratha—hear me out, Dāśarathi.

I am a faithful devotee and serve the Indra of
the gods, come rain or shine. The Gandharvas are under my
command. I journeyed to this city in accordance with
570 Indra's orders. That monarch of the gods and the god clan
wish you well. Gaze at these weapons, gem of men. The king of
gods sends them to your younger sibling. Great goddess Māyā
will come at dawn to explain by what course of action the
champion Lakṣmaṇa will slay the champion Meghanāda,
on the morrow. You are beloved by the gods, O jewel

of the Raghu clan. Abhayā herself is pleased with you!"

Replied the son of Raghu, "At these auspicious tidings,
O best of Gandharvas, I am afloat in a sea of
bliss! Yet I am but an ignorant mortal—alas, how
580 shall I ever show you my appreciation? Tell me!"

That messenger said with a smile, "Listen, gem of Raghus,
gratitude for gods, protection of the poor, suppression
of one's senses, treading ever on the path of *dharma*,
serving constantly the goddess Truth, even offerings
of sandalwood and flower blossoms, foods, and garments made
of silk and such the gods will scorn if he who offers them
is himself untrue. This basic fact I tell you truly."

Rāmacandra bowed. Charioteer Citraratha gave
his blessings, then departed for the city of the gods
590 in his godly chariot. The raucous tempest calmed; the
ocean settled down. Golden Lankā smiled again as she
gazed upon the moon with starry entourage. Entering
the gentle waters, moonlight once more bathed her silvery
form while out of curiosity the lotus blossoms
grinned. Anew, cadaver-eating jackals ran out on the
battle ground along with droves of vultures, ghouls, and buzzards.
The Rākṣasas, drunk from all the liquor of heroics,
came out-of-doors once more, brandishing their awesome bludgeons.

600

Thus ends canto number two,
called "weapons acquisition,"
in the poem
The Slaying of Meghanāda.