

In Pramoda park wept Pramīlā, that youthful daughter
of a Dānava, pained because apart from her dear spouse.
The moon-faced one, eyes filled with tears, paced constantly about
the flower garden, just like the maid of Vraja, ah me,
when she, in Vraja's flower groves, failed to find her Kṛṣṇa,
yellow-clad, under a *kadamba* tree, flute at his lips.
That lovesick woman, time and again, would step inside her
home, then re-emerge, like a pigeon, inconsolable
in her empty pigeon house. Anon, she would climb to the
10 roof of her dwelling and gaze toward distant Laṅkā, dabbing
with the loose end of her sari her ceaseless tears. Mute were
the flute, *vīṇā*, *muraja* drum, finger cymbals, and the
strains of song. The faces of her retinue turned somber
at the sorrow of their pretty mistress. And who is there
who has not seen the sullen faces of the flowers when
their forest mistress burns in separation from the spring?

To Pramoda park came goddess Night. All atremble, chaste
Pramīlā in trilling tones began to speak, though sniffing,
as she flung her arms around the neck of an attendant
20 named Vāsantī, redolent with scents of spring, "Vāsantī,
look, dark Night has come as though a deadly snake to bite me.
Where, oh where, companion, is the conqueror of foes, my
Indrajit, sovereign of the Rākṣasa clan, at this time

of peril? 'I shall be back soon,' that hero said, and went
away. I fail to comprehend the reason for this long
delay. If you should know, my confidante, do tell me, please."

Replied the attending Vāsantī, like spring's companion
cooing in the spring, "How am I to say just why the lord
of your life is late today? But, dispel your worries, you
30 whose husband lives. Your champion will return once he routs that
Rāghava. What do you have to fear, O friend? Who in a
battle can better him whose body is impervious
to the arrows of both Asuras and gods? Come, let us
saunter through the garden. We shall gather fragrant blossoms
and string the finest garland. We shall smile as we lay that
garland round your lover's neck, as when, with glee, the people
tie the victory pennant to the winning chariot's crest."

At that, those two walked through the grove where moonbeams played on ponds
thus causing lotuses to smile. Bumblebees buzzed, cuckoos
40 cooed, blossoms blossomed, and a line of fireflies shone from the
forehead of a row of trees (like a jeweled part in her
sylvan hair). Southern breezes blew, causing leaves to murmur.

Both filled the loose ends of their saris with blossoms. Who can
say how many flower petals were pearled with dewdrops from
Pramīlā's eyes? A little ways away that woman spied
a sad sunflower, face turned pale, aha, pining for her

sun, and went and stood beside her saying sweetly, "I too
suffer that same agony, darling of the sun, which you
endure on this darkest night. The world now seems most gloomy
50 to these hapless eyes of mine. My heart, it burns in flames of
lovesick separation. That sun's radiance, which I must
witness to survive, he is hidden past the setting-hill.
Yet day after day shall I gain again the monarch of
my life (as you, chaste one, will gain yours by the grace of Dawn)?"

Having gathered up a bunch of flowers from that garden,
chaste Pramīlā, heaved a sigh, dejected, then addressed her
confidante, "There now, I have plucked this heap of blossoms, friend,
and shall string a graceful garland; but where ever shall I
find those two feet which I wish to worship with this floral
60 offering. I cannot think who might impede my king of
beasts. Come, dear one, let us now all go to Laṅkā city."

Confidante Vāsantī answered, "How will you enter on
this day Laṅkā? The troops of Rāghava, like an ocean
impossible to cross, surround her. There thousands upon
thousands of the Rākṣasas' foes tromp about with weapons
in their grasp, like Daṇḍadhara, punishing staff in hand."

Pretty Pramīlā, Dānava maid, became incensed. "What
was that you said, Vāsantī? When once the stream departs her
mountain cave, heading for the sea, who is capable of

70 standing in her way? I, the daughter of a Dānava,
 a bride within the clan of Rākṣasas—Rāvaṇa is
 my father-in-law, and Meghanāda is my spouse—am
 I to fear, my friend, that beggar Rāghava? We go this
 day to Laṅkā proper by the strength of our own arms. Let
 us see by what stratagem the gem of men prevents us!"

Thus said, that faithful wife, with a gait which matched the king of
 elephants, went inside her home of gold, seized by anger.

As when the great foe-harassing charioteer Pārtha
 following that sacrificial stallion wandered to their
 80 queendom, those warrior-women dressed for battle eagerly,
 enraged by blasts from the conch shell Devadatta, just so
 all the four directions resounded with the boom of drums
 as those women strode out frenzied by the wine of valor,
 unsheathing swords, twanging bowstrings, and brandishing their shields,
 while the brilliance from their golden armor glistened, lighting
 up the city! In stables, horses whinnied as they, with
 ears erect, listened to the chink of anklets, the clatter
 of belled waistbands, just as deadly cobras dance and sway when
 they hear the rapid drumbeat of the double-headed drum
 90 called *damaru*. From stalls, elephants responded with ear-
 piercing trumpeting, as the monarch among clouds trumpets
 from afar in deep, sonorous blasts. Gaily, Echo woke

in caverns and on mountain tops in forests—filling of
a sudden the environs with her reverberations.

A most wrathful, most hot-tempered woman by the name of
Nṛmuṇḍamālinī saddled up a hundred horses
in a mix of trappings and then led them gleefully from their
stable to a nearby platform where a hundred warrior-
women mounted them, swords rattling within scabbards against
100 their steeds' flanks. The crests upon their coronets bobbed high and
low; down their backs ornamented braids swung fetchingly in
concert with their quivers. Handheld lances seemed like spiky
stalks emanating from lotus blossoms. Those horses neighed,
overcome with ecstasy, just as Virūpākṣa shouts
ecstatic while he holds upon his chest that Dānava-
destroyer's pair of lotus-feet! Martial music sounded;
immortals in the heavens gave a start, as did Nāgas
in Pātāla, and likewise men within the world of man.

Spirited Pramīlā dressed, overcoming with anger
110 her shyness and fear. The glow from the diadem atop
her chignon shone, ah alas, like Indra's bow upon the
crest of clouds. Her eyebrows drawn with black kohl were like the eye-
pleasing crescent moon upon Bhairavī's forehead. That bright-
eyed one covered her high breasts with armor and strapped a gold,
jewel-studded cummerbund artfully round her waist. Down

her back beside her quiver hung a shield, dazzling to the eyes
like the orb of the sun. Along her thigh (ah, round like
a banana tree, light of the forest!) flashed a well-honed
saber in its golden casing. Her hand grasped a long lance,
120 and many bangles sparkled on her arms. That Dānava
was fitted out like Haimavatī when, wild from wines of
valor, she crushed Mahiṣāsura in pitched battle or
when she vanquished Śumbha and Niśumbha. Like Ḍākinīs
and Yoginīs, the band of mounted maids ringed the chaste wife.
That pretty one rode Vaḍabā—flame atop the mare's fire!

As clouds call out commandingly from the skies, just so this
callipygous woman called out to her retinue in
rich, full tones, "Hear me out, Dānava maids, foe-conquering
Indrajit is now a virtual captive inside Laṅkā.
130 I am at an utter loss to comprehend why my life's
lord tarries there so long, neglecting me, his thrall. I will
go there, to his side; we will breach the monstrous enemy
lines and march into the city, overcoming the armed
forces of the Raghus' best—on this I give to you my
word, warrior-women. If we fail, then I shall perish in
the struggle—whatever has been written on my forehead!
We were born among the Dānava clan, my Dānava
maids. It is the fate of Dānavas to kill in combat,

or to drown within the river of our enemies' blood!

140 We have honey on our lips, deadly poison-glances in
our eyes! Are these tender, lotus-stalk-like arms devoid of
power? Come, one and all, let us see the manliness of
Rāghava. We shall have a look at that handsome form which
drove my auntie, Sūrpaṅakhā, mad with passion when she
saw him in the Pañcavaṭī forest; we shall gaze on
warrior Lakṣmaṇa; and we shall bind up with a *nāga-*
pāśa that cinder smudge upon the clan of Rākṣasas—
Vibhīṣaṇa! We shall trample under foot the hostile
camp, as do cow elephants to a clump of reeds. My ladies,
150 you must be like lightning and fall upon our enemy!"

Those female Dānavas let loose a menacing sound, just
like a herd of female elephants—gone mad in springtime.

As the progress of a forest fire is most difficult
to check when accompanied by its friend, the wind, just so that
chaste one headed toward her spouse, unchecked. Golden Laṅkā shook;
the ocean roared; thick clouds of dust flew up on every side—
yet when have clouds of smoke ever had the force to screen out
flames at night? With the brilliance of just such flames, the woman
Pramīlā proceeded with her band of warrior-women.

160 Shortly, that moon-faced one reached the western gate. At once a
hundred conch shells blared, a hundred awesome bows were strummed by

those women, threateningly. Lañkā quaked with terror. Mahouts
shuddered on their elephants, charioteers upon their
chariots, the best of horsemen on their mounts, the monarch
on his throne, and clan wives in their inner quarters. In their
nests birds shivered, lions in mountain lairs, wild elephants
in jungles. Aquatic creatures dove to deeper waters.

170 Hanumān, fearsome-looking son of Pavana, sallied
forth aggressively, growling out his words, "Who are you who
on this night come out to die? Hanumān stands vigilant
at this gateway—Hanumān whose very name when heard will
cause the lord of Rākṣasas to tremble on his throne! The
jewel of the Raghu clan himself stands guard, together
with his ally Vibhīṣaṇa, lion-like Saumitri,
and a hundred other warriors, so very difficult
to best in combat. Is this some joke that you dissemblers
have assumed the guise of women? I know Niśācaras
are accomplished sorcerers. But I shall shatter with strength
of arms the power of your *māyā*—I shall smash the foe
180 when and where I find him with my fright-instilling bludgeon."

The attending Nṛmuṇḍamālinī (that wrathful, hot-
tempered woman) twanged her bow inflamed, shouting threateningly,
"Barbarian, bring here at once that lord of Sītā! Who
wants you, you wretched little beast! We, by choice, have not struck

the likes of you with our weapons. Does the lioness pick
 a quarrel with a jackal? We spared your life, now scamper
 off, jungle-dweller! Simpleton, what is there to gain by
 killing you? Be off with you, call the lord of Sītā here,
 and your master Lakṣmaṇa, and call that blemish on the
 190 clan of Rākṣasas, that Vibhīṣaṇa! Foe-conquering
 Indrajit, whose wife is pretty Pramīlā—his woman
 now will enter Laṅkā, by force of arms, to worship at
 her husband's feet! What man of arms, you fool, can block her way?"

With force like that of mighty winds, Hanumān, an Indra
 among heroes and son of Pavana, rushed forward, but
 then that champion saw with trepidation there among those
 warrior-women Pramīlā, the Dānava, in attire
 most colorful. A brilliance, lightning-like, played upon her
 diadem. Her fine coat of mail glistened from her stunning
 200 figure, shining like a mesh of sunbeams interlaced and
 tinged with gems. Hanumān stood wonder struck as he thought to
 himself, "When I leapt the ocean none can leap and landed
 here in Laṅkā, I espied fearsome Bhīmā, ferocious,
 a falchion and a human skull in hand, and wearing round
 her neck a string of severed heads. I saw Rāvaṇa's sweet-
 hearts, Mandodarī and those other Dānava daughters
 all. I watched the wives and young girls of the Rākṣasas (like

slivers of the moon) return alone in dark of night, each
to her own abode. I saw that lotus of the Raghu
210 clan in the Aśoka grove (alas, distressed by sorrow).

But never have I seen throughout the world such beauty and
such sweetness as she has! Praise the warrior Meghanāda,
that such a brilliant streak of lightning should be forever
bound by bonds of love to the body of a cloud like him!"

And thinking to himself these words, the son of Añjanā
spoke in deep tones (as storms Prabhañjana), "O pretty one,
my lordship, sun among the solar clan, bound the captive
sea with fetters made of stone, then ventured to this city
accompanied by some thousand warriors. The Rākṣasas' king
220 is his foe. Your ladyship, tell me, for what reason do
you come here at this odd hour? Speak, and have no fear in
your heart. I am Hanumān, servant of the Raghus. That
wealth of Raghus is an ocean of compassion. What quarrel
do you have with him, bright-eyes? What favor do you beg? Tell
me promptly—you have come on what account? Speak. I shall make
your wishes known, your highness, at the feet of Rāghava."

The chaste one answered—aha, that message sounded to the
ears of Hanumān like the strains played on a *vīṇā* thick
with honey! "That best of Raghus is my husband's foe. Be
230 that as it may, I personally have no quarrel with him.

My husband, lion of Indras among warriors, is world-
 victor by the might of his own arms. What need have I to
 battle with his adversary? We are all mere women,
 maids among this clan. But consider this, warrior, lightning's
 splendor, which delights the eye, kills men on contact.
 Here, champion, take with you my messengeress. The lovely
 woman will relate to Rāma what I seek. Go with haste."

Messengeress Nṛmuṇḍamālinī, who resembles

her who wears the necklace strung with human heads, stepped forward
 240 fearlessly into the enemy's ranks, just as a ship
 under sail frolics in the waves without concern, even
 though afloat upon the waters of a shoreless ocean.

Hanumān went on ahead to lead the way. The warrior
 throng seemed startled by that woman, just as a householder
 is alarmed when in the dead of night he espies a fire
 in his home. That irascible woman smiled to herself.

All those warriors stared aghast. They milled about uneasy,
 banding together here and there. Anklets chimed from her feet
 as did the ornamental waistband round her midriff. An

250 awesome lance in hand, she with hips well endowed strode forward
 dominating everyone with piercing dart-like glances.

The apex of her diadem made of peacock feathers
 danced smartly there atop her head. A gemmed necklace flashed from

the cleavage between her shapely breasts. Down her back dangled
one jewel-studded braid, waving like Kāma's flag in spring.
With a young cow elephant's saunter, that voluptuous
one proceeded, casting light in all directions, just as
moonlight, the confidante of lotuses, shines upon a
clear lake, or as the rays of Dawn on mountain pinnacles.

260 Inside his tent sat the gemstone of the Raghus. Before
him stood Lakṣmaṇa, lion among champions, his hands cupped
reverently together. Off to one side was their ally
Vibhīṣaṇa, and the other warriors, most ferocious
in their mien and as spirited as the Rudra clan. The
cache of those god-given weapons shone resplendent from a
wooden altar, colored crimson by red sandalwood and
covered with a flower offering. Incense smoldered in
its censers while rows and rows of oil lamps burned on all four
sides. Everyone gazed in awe at the godly weaponry.

270 Some praised the sword; some marveled at that best of shields, with gold
overlaid, like clouds graced by the sun at sunset; others
spoke of the quiver; still others, of the armor, a mass
of brilliance. High-minded Rāghava himself held up that
best of bows, saying, "By the might of these two arms I, at
Vaidehi's bridegroom-choosing ceremony, broke the bow
named Pināka. I better not string this one! How is it,

brother Lakṣmaṇa? Would you like to bend it?" Suddenly
 the ranks cried out, and "Victory to Rāma!" rolled through the
 skies in a raucous din, like the crashing roar of ocean
 280 waves. The Rākṣasa charioteer, in panic, glanced at
 Dāśarathi, then that lion spoke, "Look, Indra among
 Raghus, beyond the camp. Does Dawn approach in dead of night?"

Wonder-struck, all gazed out past the tents. "That woman seems like
 Bhairavī," said the gem of men. "Is she Dānava or
 goddess, friend, please look. Laṅkā is a place of *māyā*; she
 is full of wizardry; and your elder brother can assume
 any shape at will. Look carefully, for that sorcerer
 is not unknown to you. It was a stroke of luck, O best
 of Rākṣasas, when I got you on my side. Who but you,
 290 friend, speak, could save these weakened forces in such peril? You
 are Rāma's lasting savior in this land of Rākṣasas!"

Just then the messengeress, escorted by Hanumān,
 reached the tent. Politely bowing, hands cupped reverently, that
 woman spoke (as if the *rāgiṇīs*, all thirty-six, had
 blended into song!), "I bow respectfully before your
 feet, Rāghava, and to all the other venerable ones—
 my name is Nṛmuṇḍamālinī. I am the servant
 of the Daitya woman, pretty Pramīlā, pleasure of
 Indrajit, lion of Indras of warriors." Offering

300 his blessings, warrior Dāśārathi asked, "Why have you made
your way here, messengeress? Tell me in detail by what
deed, auspicious one, I might please your mistress? Say at once."

The one who looked like Bhīmā answered, "You are the best of
warriors, Raghu lord. Please come fight with her. If not, then let
her pass, for that beauty will enter golden Laṅkā to
do obeisance to her lord, her husband. You slew many
Rākṣasas by might of your own arms. A Rākṣasa's wife
now begs battle; battle her, O Indra among warriors.
We are a hundred women strong—whomever you prefer
310 will fight you by herself. Take up bow and arrow, if you
choose, best of men, sword and shield, or mace—and always we are
anxious for barehanded combat! Your choice, my lord, but please
be quick about it. For your sake that chaste one holds in check
her troops, as the huntress, a Kirāta, holds her cheetah
when that lethal one goes wild on spotting a herd of deer."

Saying thus, that good woman bowed her head, as a blossom
fully blown (dewdrop studded) offers salutation by
the lowering of its head before the gentle breezes.

320 Answered the Raghu sovereign, "Listen, my sleek-haired one, I
never quarrel without cause. The Rākṣasas' sovereign is
my foe. You are all young girls and wives within the clan. For
what offense should I act bellicose toward you? Merrily,

with fearless hearts, enter Laṅkā. Rāma, my good lady,
was born of Raghu kings, kings of warriors; your mistress, bright-
eyed messengeress, is a warrior's wife, her attendants,
warrior-women. Tell her, gentlewoman, I profusely
praise her wife's devotion, her strength and valor—I beg from
her to be excused without a battle. Hail Indrajit!
Hail pretty Pramīlā! It is known throughout the world, O
330 messengeress, that Rāghava is but a beggar now;
by twist of Fate he became impoverished, a mere forest
dweller. What gift (one which would befit you), comely one, could
I give today? I give my blessings. May you be happy!"

Thus said, his lordship turned to Hanumān, "Hero, let them
pass. Oblige this host of women by most cordial conduct."

With obeisance to Sītā's husband, the messengeress
took her leave. Smiling, friend Vibhīṣaṇa spoke, "See there, O
Raghu sovereign, see the prowess of Pramīlā out there!
Note, my lord, that matchless marvel. I know not who could wage
340 a winning war with such a host of women, truly bold
Bhīmā-like Cāmuṇḍā—foe of the Raktabīja clan!"
Added Rāghava, "My heart was gripped by fear when I saw
the figure of that messengeress, best of Rākṣasas.
Then and there I put aside all thought of fight. Only a
fool, my friend, would antagonize a tigress such as that.

Come, companion, let us have a look at your nephew's wife."

350 Just as when a forest fire far away penetrates a
wooded stand, filling full of flames all ten directions, that
Indra of Rāghavas saw in smokeless skies before him
a glowing mass which tinged with gold the gathered clouds. Alarmed,
he listened to the clatter of their bows, the trotting hooves
of horses, the threatening shouts, the jangle of their swords sheathed
in scabbards. Their instruments of music rang out, blending
with other sounds, as if waves of warbling birds were carried
by a thunderstorm. Banners fluttered—glimmering from gems
embossed. Horses pranced, then cantered smoothly; their belled trappings
jingled. On either side stood tall a column of soldiers
like two mountain ranges—between them marched that female corps,
just as lumbers through a mountain pass cow elephants who
360 fill the land with trumpeting and cause the earth to tremble.

Ahead, the wrathful, hot-tempered Nṛmuṇḍamālinī,
mounted on her kohl-black steed, held a golden banner staff
in hand. Behind her, the musicians stood just like a troupe
of heaven-sent Vidyādhariḥ, ah, peerless upon the
face of the earth; *vīṇā*, flute, *mṛdaṅga* drums, small cymbals,
and the like, blended in sweet tripping notes. Behind them, in
amongst lance-wielding warrior-women was Pramīlā, like
a crescent moon among a constellation! in prowess,

just like Bhīmā! All about her there danced lightning's splendor,
 370 born of gems. And through the welkin brandishing his flower-
 bow, Rati's husband wantonly accompanied her, striking
 her repeatedly with unfailing blossom-darts. Like the
 buffalo-destroying Durgā on her lion's back; like
 Śacī, Indra's consort, on Airavata; like Ramā,
 wife of Upendra upon the Indra among birds—like
 them all, that purest heroine appeared resplendent
 astride her Vaḍabā, who was herself the queen of mares
 caparisoned in jewels! Slowly, deliberately, as though
 oblivious to the hostile throng, that troop of women
 380 marched. Some strummed their bowstrings; others shouted, brandishing their
 swords; some vaunted lances; others laughed; while still others roared
 like lionesses, deep in the forest, or Bhairavī,
 driven mad by love and valor's strong intoxication!

Glancing toward that best of Rākṣasas, Rāghava spoke, "How
 amazing, Naikaṣeya! I have never seen, never
 even heard of such a one in all of the three worlds! Have
 I awakened to a dream? Tell me honestly, greatest
 jewel of friends. I cannot fathom this. It unnerves me here
 to witness such a strange illusion, friend, so do not you
 390 deceive me too. From charioteer Citraratha's mouth I
 heard the news that goddess Māyā would descend to help her

slave. Is it she who perpetrated such a hoax, disguised
as faithful consort, and is it she who now proceeds to
Lañkā? Tell me, wise one, who is doing the beguiling?"

Answered Vibhīṣaṇa, "I tell you truly, this is no
nocturnal dream, Vaidehī's husband. There is a Daitya
by the name of Kālanemi, renowned throughout the world,
a foe of the divines; this pretty Pramīlā is his
daughter. The woman, my lord, was born from part of goddess
400 Mahāsakti and so is just as powerful as the
"Great Śakti." Who can match that Dānava in prowess? The
captivating woman, O Indra among Rāghavas,
keeps under foot the Indra among Rākṣasas, that
lion, yellow-eyed, who defeated on the battlefield
lightning-hurling Sahasrākṣa—as Digambarī keeps
under foot Digambara. To save the world, Providence
wrought these bonds which bind the hero Meghanāda, deadly
elephant upon a rampage. Just as streams of water
damp a dreaded forest fire, the enemy of woodlands,
410 so does this chaste wife damp with loving conversation that
doomsday fire constantly. The deadly hooded viper,¹ its
strike now overpowered, remains submerged under fragrant
waters of the Yamunā. Hence, those who dwell amidst this
universe live in happiness—gods in heaven, Nāgas

in their lowly Pātāla, men within the world of man."

The Raghu sovereign spoke, "It is true what you say, best of friends; charioteer Meghanāda is the greatest of the charioteers. I have not seen skill like his in all of the three worlds! and I have fought with Bhṛgurāma, a mountain of a warrior, immovable in battle. It was, indeed, an auspicious moment, friend, when your nephew seized the bow and arrow. What shall I do now, tell me, gem of Rākṣasas? When the mighty lioness joins her mate within the forest, who can protect my herd of deer? See there, the ocean filled with *halāhala* poison surges all about us with an awful roar. As Nilakaṇṭha (conqueror of Nistāriṇī's heart) saved the world, just so, my friend, by your power save those under your protection. Consider well, O champion, your elder brother is as fatal as a snake, his poison fangs, that greatest hero, Indrajit. If I could somehow break those fangs, my fondest hopes would be fulfilled; if not, I declare to you, I bound the sea and ventured onto golden Laṅkā all for naught."

Bowing low before his brother's feet, champion Saumitri spoke, "Why should we any longer fear the Rākṣasa, O Raghu sovereign? He who has the favor of the lord of gods, what need he fear in all three worlds, my lordship? For sure,

Rāvaṇi will fall, defeated by my hand tomorrow.

440 When and where does that which is not *dharma* triumph? The king
of the Rākṣasas practices non-*dharma*; on the field
of battle, Meghanāda will be stripped of strength due to
those iniquities. For the father's faults, the son shall die.
Tomorrow he who is the sun to lotus Laṅkā will
descend the setting-hill; so said Citraratha, divine
charioteer. So, my lord, for what reason do you fret?"

Replied Vibhīṣaṇa, "What you say is true enough, O
elephant of warriors. Where there is *dharma*, there follows
victory. By his own transgressions, alas, is the sovereign
of the Rākṣasas now ruined. Meghanāda, foeman
450 of the monarch of the skies, will die by your arrows. But
you must be careful. This Dānava, Pramīlā, displays
great prowess; and Nṛmuṇḍamālinī—like the goddess,
she who wears a garland made of human heads—is fond of
battle. One who lives beside a forest in which roams the
deadly lioness should be always vigilant. Who knows
when, where, and on whom that Bhīmā will pounce next. If from Night
he obtains protection, we shall kill him in the morning."

Then the gem of Raghus addressed friend Vibhīṣaṇa, "If
you would, O best of Rākṣasas, take Lakṣmaṇa along
460 with you from gate to gate and look in on the soldiers. See

who stands guard tonight and where. All were greatly wearied by the battle waged with Vīrabāhu. Check around—what is Aṅgada about; where is Nīla, the great hero; our ally, Sugrīva, where is he? At this western gate, I myself shall keep the watch, bow in hand." "By your command," the champion answered, then set off with the joy of Ūrmilā. The two of them shone splendidly like Tāraka's slayer accompanied by the sovereign of the gods, or like the moon, that fount of nectar, in the presence of the lord of light.

470

Faithful Pramīlā reached the golden gates of Laṅkā. Horns blared; war drums rumbled with their ear-splitting pounding. Gigantic Rākṣasas thundered like Pralaya's thunderclouds, or like a herd of elephants. Rākṣasa Virūpākṣa flew into a rage, a *prakṣvedana* weapon in his hand; likewise Tālajaṅghā, who held a palm-tree club; and just so did Pramatta, whose appearance terrified! Horses whinnied; elephants began their trumpeting; chariot wheels squawked and squealed; ferocious pikemen brandished pikes; iron-shafted *nārācas* were launched, blocking out the lord of Night.

480

The heavens, on fire, filled with tumult, as when, earth quaking, grumbling thunderously, a volcano spews forth streams of fire out into the dead of night! In panic, Laṅkā shuddered.

Hot-tempered Nṛmuṇḍamālinī hollered loudly, "Whom

would you slay with your weapons, timid ones, in this darkness?
 We are not the foes of Rākṣasas but rather are their
 faithful wives! Open up your eyes! See for yourselves!" At once,
 gatekeepers seized the bolt and tugged, as it creaked and groaned. With
 sounds like that of thunder, those gates now parted. Joyous, the
 pretty one entered golden Laṅkā to cries of "Victory!"

490 As when moths spot a flame, then cluster round in glee, so too
 came the townsfolk on the run from all directions. The wives
 among them produced auspicious calls of *ululu* and
 showered them with flowers while, inspired, bards extolled them
 to the strains of music. Those dashing women marched ahead,
 as do waves of fire through a densely wooded forest. The
 Vidyādhari-like musicians played on their *vīṇā*, flute,
muraja drums, and tiny cymbals. Horses neighed as they
 pranced high. Swords jangled in their sheaths. Babies woke up startled
 in their mother's lap. Many maiden Rākṣasas opened
 500 peepholes, peered through, then, delighted, praised the prowess of that
 Pramīlā. Shortly she, consumed by love, reached her husband's
 home—like a serpent, jewel lost, on finding it again!

 Foe-defeating Indrajit spoke in a lighthearted vein,
 "After besting Raktabīja, you now return, I guess,
 to Kailāsa and your home, my moon-faced one? If you so
 order, I shall fall before your feet, for I am your most

constant servant, O Cāmuṇḍā!" Smiling, his wife said, "By
the grace of your two feet, my lord, this slave has overcome
the world; I cannot, however, overcome Manmatha.

510 Contemptuous of the arrow's fire, yet ever do I
dread the fires (most inexplicable) of separation
from you. It causes me to come to whom my heart desires
always! as the playful river flows to the sea at last."

So saying, that chaste one stepped into the house, divesting
her person of her martial raiment. She then put on a
white silk sari with gem-embroidered border and fastened
tight across her comely breasts a bodice. On her hips shone
an ornamental girdle; a diamond necklace and a
string of pearls swung to and fro upon her bosom. The part
520 in her hair was lined with a twinkling starry headdress from
which a single jewel dangled on her forehead, while the
hue of gems sparkled from her tresses, and earrings from her
ears. That stunning beauty had donned these many ornaments.
The crown-gem of Rākṣasas, Meghanāda, floated on
the sea of bliss as the couple took their seat upon a
throne of gold. A troupe of singers serenaded, dancing
girls performed—as do Vidyādharas and Vidyādharis
in their heavenly abode. Forgetting their own sorrows,
birds sang from inside cages. Fountains gurgled, gushed upwards,

530 as does the ocean at a moonbeam's touch. Spring breezes blew
honeyed tones, as when the king of seasons sports with woodlands
lovingly throughout sweet springtime in some secluded spot.

Accompanied by Vibhīṣaṇa, lionesque Saumitri
at this point proceeded to the northern gate; high-minded
Sugrīva stood guard himself, vigilant with his troop of
warriors, immovable in war—like peaks of the Vindhya
mountain range. At the eastern gate was Nīla, an awesome
figure; goddess Sleep importuned him there in vain. Before
the southern gate prowled prince Aṅgada, as does a hungry
540 lion hunting food, or as does Nandī, with spear in hand,
before Kailāsa's peak. Smokeless bonfires in the hundreds
burned round about encircling Laṅkā, like the moon in a
clear sky amidst encircling stars. At each of the four gates
a company of warriors stood watch—as when, by the grace
of rain clouds, cultivated crops grow day by day and on
a platform raised beside the field a peasant stands alert,
scaring off the herds of deer, huge water buffalo, and
other sorts of herbivorous beasts. These troops of warriors,
the bane of Rākṣasas, were on duty all round Laṅkā.

550 Quite satisfied, the two of them retraced their steps to the
tent where, composed and calm, waited warrior Dāśarathi.

With a smile, Umā, in Kailāsa, addressed Vijayā

saying, "Gaze down, my moon-faced one, toward Laṅkā. In warrior's
garb shapely Pramīlā now enters through the city gates,
escorted by her ranks of women. The luster from her
golden breastplate reaches to the skies. They stand dumbfounded,
look, that gem of mankind, Rāghava, Saumitri, their friend
Vibhīṣaṇa, and all those other warriors. Who in the
world of men possesses such exquisite beauty? I once
560 dressed in such attire, during the Satya *yuga*, in
order to destroy the Dānavas. There, listen to that
ominous sound! Drawing back the bowstring, that lady snaps
it angrily and shouts. All about, the monstrous army
trembles. See, the diadem upon her hair bun dances.
That woman with the fairest skin now crests, now troughs as her
mount canters on—ah, goodness me—like a golden lotus
upon the undulating ripples of Lake Mānasa!"

Her confidante, Vijayā, answered, "True enough, what you
say, Haimavatī—who indeed in the world of mankind
570 has such beauty? I know Pramīlā, heroic daughter
of the Dānavas, is your thrall. But consider this, O
Bhavānī—how will you keep your promise? Indrajit, in
power, is himself world-victor; now Pramīlā has joined
with him—flame, the wind's companion, has joined the wind itself!
Tell me now, Kātyāyanī, how will you rescue Rāma?"

And how will champion Lakṣmaṇa destroy the Rākṣasa?"

Śaṅkarī thought a moment, then replied, "My beautiful
Pramīlā was born a part of me, Vijayā. I shall,
come morning, withdraw from her my power. As the gem, which
580 dazzles from the touch of brilliant sunlight, turns lackluster
at the close of day, in like fashion I shall enervate
that woman on the morrow. No doubt, in combat champion
Lakṣmaṇa will vanquish Meghanāda! Pramīlā and
husband will come here. Rāvaṇi will serve our Śiva; and
we shall welcome Pramīlā, making her my companion."

That said, Satī went inside her house. On silent footsteps
goddess Sleep approached Kailāsa, whose inhabitants gained
respite on their beds of blooms. The crescent moon on Bhava's
forehead brightened, spreading through the house a silvery cast.

590

Thus ends canto number three,
called "reuniting,"
in the poem
The Slaying of Meghanāda.