Night turned to morning. Encircling Lankā there arose a monstrous roar, proclaiming boldly victory for Rāma.

He left his golden throne and, morose, sat upon the ground, alas, that Rāvaņa, ruler of the Rākṣasas. Then it was he heard terrifying sounds, the likes of crashing ocean waves. Surprised, that finest charioteer inquired, glancing toward Sāraṇa, "Speak plainly, O wise and best of counselors, for what reason does the hostile throng shout, they who through the night were miserable with sorrow. Quickly tell me. Has that unfair fighter, stupid Saumitri, once again revived? Who knows why the clan of gods, benign, would do such a thing. That Rāma, who chained the ever-moving currents, by whose force of $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ stones float on the water's surface, who survives though slain in combat twice—is there anything within this world of which he is incapable? Tell me, I must hear, O best of ministers, what has happened now?"

Hands cupped in deference, that best of ministers replied with regret. "Who comprehends gods' $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ in this world of $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$, Indra among kings? Gandhamādana, sovereign among mountains and a god by nature, came himself last night bearing a panacea and resuscitated Lakṣmaṇa, O king. That is why their legions shout for joy. As at winter's end a snake possesses twice the vigor,

likewise champion Saumitri shows a renewed spirit—now intoxicated by the wine of valor. And so too, with Sugrīva, the southerners are enlivened, like a herd of elephants, my lord—one hears—with its lordly bull."

Disheartened, that finest charioteer, Lanka's sovereign, sighing spoke, "Who can reverse the will of Fate? When vanquished, even immortals die, but that foe whom I had slain in face-to-face combat, did he revive again through divine might? O Sāraņa, by my bad luck, even Krtānta has forgotten his prime duty. If once the lion sinks his teeth into the deer, does he ever let him flee? But what is the point of useless grieving? I knew then all was lost—when that sun, pride of Rāksasas, set in darkness, when my brother Kumbhakarna, the utter likeness of the trident-bearing Sambhu, died in war, as has now our prince, victor over Vāsava, a second Śaktidhara in this world.¹ For what purpose do I cling to my own life? Shall I yet again regain them both upon this earth? Go, my Sāraņa, to the skilled charioteer Rāghava. Tell that champion: 'Rāvaņa, the wealth of Rāksasas, O great-armed one, begs this of you-stay with your army in this land for seven days, forgoing all hostilities, O charioteer. My sovereign wishes to perform his son's

cremation rites properly. Observe the warriors' code of ethics, Raghu monarch. A warrior always proffers due respect to brave opposing warriors. By your strength of arms, O hero, golden Lańkā, bearer of brave warriors, is now warriorless. You are to be praised among the warrior brotherhood. You grasped the bow at an auspicious moment, gem of men. Kind Fate has shown you favor; and, by divine authority, the king of Rākṣasas now finds himself in jeopardy. Good warrior, grant today a foeman's wish.' Hasten now, best of ministers, to the camp of Rāma."

With praises to the Indra of the Rākṣasas, that most excellent of counselors, his entourage in tow, set forth. Without a word, the warders opened wide the gateway loudly. In measured steps that minister of Rākṣasas moved out somberly toward the ever roaring ocean's shore.

Inside his tent sat his lordship, jewel of the Raghu clan, submerged within a sea of bliss. In front of him stood Saumitri, monarch among charioteers, like a tree now free of snow with new sap flowing, or like the moon in full phase in a joyous sky, or like a lotus, at night's end, full blown. And on his right, the Rākṣasa ally, that hero Vibhīṣaṇa, with all the generals—those most difficult to overcome in war—as though the Indra

of the gods were flanked by warriors from among the god clan.

Promptly, a courier relayed this news in brief:

"A minister from the clan of Rākṣasas, Sāraṇa, my lord, renowned throughout the world, is at the entrance to our camp, accompanied by his retinue—what is your order, gem of men, please tell this thrall of yours." The best of Raghus declared, "Bring at once, courier, with courtesy that most excellent of counselors to this place. For who does not know that in combat messengers must not be slain?"

Sāraņa then stepped inside the tent and spoke (praising those two royal feet), "Rāvaņa, the wealth of Rākṣasas, O great-armed one, begs this of you, 'Stay with your army in this land for seven days, foregoing all hostilities, O charioteer. My sovereign wishes to perform his son's cremation rites properly. Observe the warriors' code of ethics, Raghu monarch. A warrior always proffers due respect to brave opposing warriors. By your strength of arms, O hero, golden Lańkā, bearer of brave warriors, is now warriorless. You are to be praised among the warrior brotherhood. You seized the bow at an auspicious moment, gem of men. Kind Fate has shown you favor; and by divine authority the king of Rākṣasas now finds himself in jeopardy. Good warrior, grant today a foeman's wish.'"

90

The Raghu lord replied, "The greatest of my enemies, O Sāraņa, is your master. Nonetheless, by his grief, I tell you truly, I am most aggrieved. Whose heart would not be consumed at seeing Rāhu devour the sun? The kingly banyan tree who, in forests, burns beneath the sun's fierce rays, he too at such a death is ashen faced. In times of woe one's own and an outsider are alike to me, O best of ministers. Return to golden Laṅkā. I and my forces shall not take up arms for seven days. Tell the lord of Rākṣasas, O learned one, persons firm in acting in accord with *dharma*." The hero, speaking thus, fell mute.

Head bowed, the minister of Rākṣasas replied, "You are the finest of the clan of men, jewel of the Raghus; in learning, intelligence, and might of arms you have no equal in the world. This action of yours is quite fitting, hear me out, magnanimous one. Do good men ever do improper deeds? Just as hero Naikaṣeya is the ruler of the Rākṣasas, so you, O Rāghava, are sovereign among men. At some star-crossed moment—excuse my emotions, charioteer, I beg before your feet!—but, at some star-crossed moment, the two of you encounter one another as though bitter foes. Who can alter edicts

made by Fate? That same Fate, O great-armed one, who created Pavana as hostile to the sea, who made the Indra among beasts the foe of Indras among elephants, the Indra of the birds antagonistic to the serpents. It is through deceit wrought by His *māyā* that Rāghava

is the enemy of Rāvaņa—whom else can we blame?"

On securing such a favor, he sped home in great haste to where the lord of Rākṣasas sat quiet, his vestments moist from outpourings of tears, ah me, grief stricken. Meanwhile, the sovereign among men gave his chiefs the order. Gaily each cast off his battle garb and, in his own tent, rested.

Where sat Vaidehī in the Asoka grove—as, alas, sat chaste Kamalā beneath unfathomed seas, apart from her husband—to there came Saramā, Rājalakṣmī of the Rākṣasa clan, clad in wifely Rākṣasa attire. With praises to those lotus feet, that gentlewoman sat before her. Maithilī, speaking in honeyed tones, queried, "Please tell me, moon-faced one, why have this city's residents wept and wailed these past two days? I listened fearfully to war cries from the battlefield all yesterday; forests shook as though from earthquakes—underneath those warriors' distant footfalls; in the sky I noticed arrows, leaping like fire's flame tips; at the close of day, the Rāksasa forces backtracked to their city to triumphal shouts while musicians played
a stirring air. Who won? Who lost? I implore you, tell me,
please, Saramā. My agitated heart, alas, dearest,
feels no solace. Here I know not whom to query. I get
no answer when I ask the sentry women. And, O friend,
hideous Trijațā, that red-eyed one, sharp sword in hand,
looking ever so like Cāmuņdā, came to cut me up
last night, blind with rage. But these sentry matrons held her back;
and that is why, my sleek-haired one, this hapless thing yet lives.
My heart yet flutters when I call to mind that fell one."

Chaste Saramā replied with sweetest speech, "It is your good fortune, lucky one, that Indrajit has lost his life in combat. Hence Lańkā mourns so, day and night. Finally, my lady, that heroic king of Karbūras is weakened. Mandodarī whimpers; the women of the Rākṣasa clan are overwhelmed with grief; joyless are the Rākṣasa charioteers. On the strength of your virtue, lotus-eyed, your brother-in-law, skilled charioteer Lakṣmaṇa, did in combat that of which the gods were unable—he slew him who had bested Vāsava—invincible worldwide."

She of the pleasing tongue responded, "You are to my ears Suvacanī incarnate, always, in this city, my dearest, O Rāksasa wife. Praise Saumitri, a lion

160

170

180

of Indras among warriors. At a very auspicious moment did my mother-in-law, Sumitrā, conceive, O friend, a son like him within her womb. Now at last, perhaps Fortune, in its mercy, has thrown open wide my prison doors. Ravana, most nefarious of charioteers, now stands alone in Lanka. Let us see what happens-let us see what further grief is written on my forehead.² But listen well. Gradually the wailing sounds intensify, friend." Said Saramā-Suvacanī, "The Indra among Karbūras, by treaty with the Indra of the Raghu clan, is taking to the ocean's shore for funeral rites his son, chaste one. For seven days and nights, in this land of Rāksasas none shall bear arms in hostility—this pledge the gem of men made at $R\bar{a}vana's$ request—an ocean of compassion is that Indra among Raghavas, your highness. Pretty Pramīlā, the Daitya woman—her heart splits in two, O faithful wife, when she contemplates all this -pretty Pramīlā, who to the funeral pyre will give her body, she, a chaste wife seeking for her husband—O you who are devoted ever to your husband-she will enter the godly city of divines today. Did not chaste Rati die along with her life's lord when Kandarpa, my gentle woman, burned to death in Hara's anger's fire?"

That Rāksasa wife, already wet from the water of her tears, sobbed, overflowing with anguish. Then she who is, as Sītā, compassion incarnate on the surface of the earth, she who by another's sorrows is herself made sad, spoke—eyes suffused with liquid as she told her friend, "I was born at an ill-omened time, Saramā Rāksasī. The lamp of joy, companion, I extinguish always in whatever house I enter, I who am the essence of inauspiciousness. Fortune has inscribed this wretched luck. My husband, finest among men, just see, is banished to the forest. And a forest exile, O dear girl who bears auspicious markings, is my husband's brother, high-minded Laksmana. Confidante, over sorrow for his son my father-in-law gave up his life. Ayodhyā city is now dark, my dear. The kingly throne sits vacant. Jațāyu succumbed by strength of fearsome arms from monstrous forces while defending to the death the honor of this humble slave. Now over there—that Vāsavajit, because of me, the luckless one, he too is dead and all of those Raksasa charioteers—who can even count their number? Now will die that youthful female Danava, incomparable in beauty in this world. At the start of spring, ah me, such a bloom is made to wither!" "Your fault," responded Sarama,

wiping back her tears, "whatever are you saying, pretty one? Who was it stripped away and bore you, golden creeper, here, first having tricked the king among the mango trees? Who plucked the lotus of the Raghu's fancy and brought her to this land of Rākṣasas? By the fruits of his own deed is Laṅkā's ruler ruined. What more can this humble servant say?" Most doleful, Saramā wept. At the sorrow of the clan of Rākṣasas, Rāghava's beloved wailed in that Asoka grove, saddened from the sadness felt by others.

The western gates swung open with the noise of thunder. Out came thousands of Rākşasas, hands clenching golden staves from which fluttered silken banners. In file they walked on either side of the royal way. Silent were those standard bearers. Ahead of all there went the kettledrums upon the backs of elephants, drums which filled the land with solemn booming; on foot came soldiers, row by row; then horse columns and the elephants; charioteers in their chariots, driven at a measured pace; and the instruments of music made their mournful sounds. As far as one could see, that joyless throng of Rākşasas proceeded toward the sea. Their glittering gold armor overwhelmed the eye. Their golden banner-staves shone with sunbeams' brilliance. On their heads were diadems; on belts hung scabbards; hands held spears; from eyes, alas, ran tears.

240

250

Out came the warrior-women (Pramīlā's maidservants), in valor just like Bhīmā, beautiful as Vidyādharīs, clothed in battle dress—Nrmundamālinīs mounted upon black horses—sullen faces, ah yes, like Night without her Moon. Teary streams flowed unchecked, dampening their uniforms, dampening their mounts, dampening the earth herself. Some sobbed openly; other women cried in silence; some gazed toward the Raghu army angrily, eyes filled with fire, as a tigress (once ensnared) stares at the nearby hunting party. Aha, where is that laughter, light of lightning? Where are those darting sidelong glances which are capable of piercing all in passion's combat? Amidst the women sentries pranced Vadaba, unsaddled, empty of her beauty, as a stalk without its bloom. Female servants all about waved their fly-whisks to and fro; there walked with them a train of ladies weeping all along the way; a tumult rose into the sky. Pramīlā's heroic garb shone resplendent, loosely draped upon the back of Vadabā—sword, armor, quiver, bow, and diadem, aha, studded with such priceless gems. A jeweled waistband, her coat of mail interlaced with gold both of them now lackluster; for the waistband, yes, recalled her thin waistline, while the coat of mail remembered her high pair of lovely breasts, like peaks of mountains. Slave girls scattered

cowry shells, parched rice, gold coins, and the like; songstresses sang woefully; Rākṣasīs beat their comely bosoms, weeping.

Out came chariots moving slowly, among them was that best of chariots, rich hued, lightning's sparkle on its wheels, flags, the colors found in Indra's bow, on its pinnacles but this day it was devoid of splendor, like the empty splendor of an idol's frame without its life-like painted image, at the end of an immersion ceremony.³ The Rāksasa charioteers let out an awful wail, beside themselves, pounding chests at times with tremendous blows. Inside the chariot blazed the fearsome bow, quiver, shield, falchion, conch, discus, mace and other weapons; a fine coat of armor; a crown like concentrated sunshine; and all the rest of the heroic accouterments. Singers sang their songs of pathos, bemoaning the Raksasas' plight. Some strew gold coins, as trees cast off their flowers when they writhe in violent storms. Water bearers sprinkled scented water, keeping down dusty billows which had ceased to tolerate the footsteps' burden. Toward the seashore moved that chariot.

Upon the cushion of a gold palanquin, bloom-strewn, sat pretty Pramīlā beside the body—as Rati in the mortal world accompanies disembodied Kāma. A vermilion dot upon her forehead, round her neck a 280

290

garland, bangles ringed her lotus-stalk-like limbs; ornaments of many sorts adorned this wifely Rakşasa. Females wielding fly-whisks wept and waved their fine fans up and down, while others, crying, flung flowers hither and yon. With sadness now uncontrolled, these Raksasa womenfolk wailed aloud. Where, alas, was that light which ever glowed upon her moonlike face? Where, ah me, that charming smile which always shone so beautifully upon those nectared lips, as the makerof-the-day's rays on those bimba-like red lips of yours, O lotus? Vowed to silence, that moon-faced one turned heart and head toward husband, as though her lord were present now. When the king of trees withers, so too wastes away the vine, that lovely bride who chooses for herself her bridegroom. A prodigious throng of charioteers filed out on either side, in hand bared swords off which flashed sunbeams, as luster from their golden armor stunned the eyes. And all about, those learned in the Vedas recited scripture aloud; the hotrī priest, while carrying the sacred fire, recited the great *mantra*; sundry ornaments and articles of clothing, sandal paste, musk, saffron, flowers, and vermilion were transported by the Raksasa wives on golden platters; gold jars held sacred Ganges water. Everywhere were lamps of gold which glowed. Huge *dhāka* drums reverberated, smaller *dhola*

drums resounded, and *kāṣās*, tumbler-shaped percussions, barked, small cup-like cymbals clanged, *mṛdaṅga* drums and hollowed gourds were played; dish-round gongs and conch shells blared while those among the Rākṣasīs not widowed, moist with tears, called out *ululu* ah, an auspicious sound on that most inauspicious day.

Out stepped the king of Rākṣasas, Rāvaṇa, dressed in white, white shawl and garland of *dhuturā* round his neck, as though about the throat of Dhūrjați himself. On all four sides but at a distance stood his ministers, heads bowed. Silent was that sovereign of the Karbūras, eyes full of tears, and silent his counselors and those best of Rākṣasas who wielded some authority. Bringing up the rear, weeping, were residents who lived within that Rākṣasa city the children, women, and old men. That city, empty now, grew dark as Gokula without Śyāma. Slowly, toward the sea they moved, awash in tears. Sounds of mourning filled the land.

His lordship spoke to Angada in mellow tones, "Go with a thousand charioteers, O prince and hero, and in friendly fashion accompany the Rākṣasa legion to the ocean's shore. Go cautiously, good warrior. My heart is agitated by the misery felt by Rākṣasas. At such times of crisis, I do not distinguish others from my own, O prince. Since, on seeing champion Laksmana,

320

the ruler of the Karbūras, remembering what has taken place, might anger, you, prince, go instead. Crown-jewel among kings, your father bested Rākṣasas in combat; kindly, courteous one, perform this act to honor him."

With ten hundred charioteers went the gracious warrior Angada, heading seaward. And in the sky the god clan gathered—the sovereign of the divines on Airāvata, along with his fine-figured woman, the ever youthful Sacī, and peacock-bannered Skanda with his peacock flag, a general and the enemy of Tāraka. In a multicolored chariot arrived charioteer Citraratha; upon a deer there came the monarch of the winds; Krtanta rode his monstrous water buffalo;⁴ in his own Puspaka he drove-the Yaksa, sovereign of Alakā; Night's husband came, that peaceful fount of nectar who pales before the power of the sun; the smiling twins, Asvinī's sons, were there, and many other gods. Godly dancing girls appeared, and the Gandharvas and Apsarās, Kinnaras and Kinnarīs. Artfully the instruments of heaven sounded through the skies. Gods and sages came from curiosity, as did other residents on high.

They reached the seashore whereat Rākṣasas quickly built a proper pyre. Bearers brought sweet scented sandalwood and ghee

in quantities. With sacred Mandakina water, those Rāksasas washed carefully the corpse, then dressed it in fine silken garments, and placed it on the pyre. Solemnly, their purohit recited mantras. Having bathed her body in that sacred place of pilgrimage, the ocean, the most chaste of faithful wives, that pretty Pramīlā, divested herself of ornaments and jewels, bestowing them on all those present. With obeisance to her revered elders, that one of honeyed speech addressed the group of Daitya maids saying sweetly, "O companions, after all this time my life today comes to an end in this arena of the living. Return, all of you, to our Daitya homeland. Speak politely at my father's feet, Vāsantī, all the news. And to my mother." Alas, the tears began to stream. That chaste wife kept silent-the Danava women sobbed out loud.

Then a moment later, holding back her grief, that pretty one spoke up, "Tell my mother, that which Fortune wrote upon the forehead of this humble servant finally today has come to pass. To whose hands my parents gave this humble slave, it is with him, my dear, I go this day—within our world what refuge is there for a wife without her husband? What more shall I say, my friend? Do not forget her, dearest ones—this is Pramīlā's most earnest plea to all of you."

That purest wife then mounted the pyre (as though onto a floral throne) and sat with peace of mind at her husband's feet, a garland of full-blown blossoms wrapped around her chignon. The Rākṣasa musicians played, and aloud those versed in texts recited from the Vedas. The women Rākṣasa gave out auspicious calls of *ululu* which, when joined with ululations, rose into the skies. Flowers showered all around. The Rākṣasa maidens, as was proper, proffered sundry ornaments and articles of clothing, sandal paste, musk, saffron, vermilion and so forth. The Rākṣasas carefully arranged on all four sides sharp arrows smeared with ghee, arrows used for killing beasts, just as is done the ninth day during Durgā Pūjā in households of the Śākta

The monarch of the Rākṣasas stepped forward, then spoke with anguish, "It was my hope, Meghanāda, that I would close these eyes of mine for the final time with you before me transferring to you, son, the responsibility for this kingdom, I would set out on my greatest journey. But Fate—how shall I ever comprehend His *līlā*? That joy eluded me. It was my hope to soothe my eyes, dear lad, by seeing you upon the Rākṣasas' regal throne, on your left my daughter-in-law, the Lakṣmī of this clan of

Rāksasas, as consort. Futile were those hopes. For due to fruits of a previous birth I observe you both today upon the throne of Time.⁵ That sun, the pride of Karbūras, is forever swallowed up by Rahu. Did I serve with care Siva just to gain but these ends? How shall I ever turn back now—ah, who can tell me how I might return to Lank \bar{a} and our empty home? By what feigned consolation shall I console your mother—who can tell me that? 'Where are my son and daughter-in-law?'-queen Mandodarī, when she asks me, 'For what pleasures did you leave them at the seashore, sovereign of the Raksasas?'—what shall I say to make her understand? Alas, what can I say? Son. Preeminent of warriors. Victorious in battle always. Little Mother, Laksmī of the Rāksasas. For what transgression did Fate write this cruel pain upon the monarch's forehead?"

At his Kailāsa home, Śūlī was beside himself. His matted hair tilted to one side upon his head; with a vicious roar his serpents hissed; from his forehead flames leapt forth; the Tripathagā poured down her frightful crashing waves, like swiftly flowing streams through mountain caverns. Mount Kailāsa shook violently. In panic the universe quaked. Fearful, faithful Abhayā, hands cupped humbly, addressed Maheśa,

"For what reason are you angry, lord? Tell me, your servant,

please. He died in war, that Rākṣasa, by Fate's decree. Do not blame the Raghu warrior. If you wrongly harm him, lord, first burn me to ashes." And at that, Mother hugged his feet.

With feeling, raising Satī, Dhūrjați replied, "My heart breaks, Nagendra's daughter, from the Rākṣasas' woe. You know how I love the champion Naikaṣeya. But, for your sake, Kṣemaṅkarī, I forgive that Rāma and his brother."

To Agni, god of fire, Triśūlī commanded sadly, "Sanctify them by your touch, you who are most pure, and bring at once to this auspicious home that Rākṣasa and wife."

In the form of lightning streaks, Agni ran to earth. Then at once the pyre burst ablaze. All, startled, looked upon that fiery chariot. There on a seat of gold within the chariot sat the warrior, vanquisher of Vāsava, in celestial form. On his left, pretty Pramīlā whose splendor of unending youth shone from her graceful figure and on whose honeyed lips, a smile of everlasting joy.

With great speed that best of chariots climbed its skyward path as the god clan in concert rained down flowers, and the universe filled with blissful sounds. The Rākṣasas put out those brilliant flames in streams of pure milk. With utmost care they gathered up the ashes and immersed them in the ocean. Having washed that cremation site using water from the Jāhnavī, Rākṣasa craftsmen by the thousands built with golden bricks a temple on the spot where stood the pyre that temple's lofty spire, cleaving clouds, rose to the sky.

After bathing in waters of the sea, those Rākṣasas now headed back toward Laṅkā, wet still with water of their grief—it was as if they had immersed the image of the goddess on the lunar tenth day of the Durgā Pūjā. Then Laṅkā wept in sorrow seven days and seven nights.

Thus ends canto number nine,

called "funeral rites,"

in the poem

The Slaying of Meghanāda