

Hero Saumitri the lion left that woods, returning  
to the camp where the lordly Raghu king was waiting. That  
noble-natured one moved swiftly, as when a huntsman spies  
the king of beasts in the forest, then runs for his weapons  
—to choose with haste his deadliest club for mortal combat.

Moments later, that most celebrated one reached the spot  
where the Raghu charioteer stood. Bowing before that  
pair of feet, then showing deference to Vibhīṣaṇa,  
their best of friends, the high-minded one spoke, "This faithful thrall  
10 of yours has found success today, my lord, by your blessings.  
With your two feet in mind, I proceeded to the forest  
and there did *pūjā* to Cāmuṇḍā, my lordship, in her  
golden temple. To confuse your servant, a myriad  
of chaste maids spread their net of *māyā*—how shall I, who am  
so ignorant, recount all of that before your feet? I  
came upon Candracūḍa, guardian of the gates, but  
he let me pass without a struggle due to the power  
of your virtues, my lord—just as a great serpent slithers  
away, powerless against the virtues of a potent  
20 antidote!—and thereupon this slave of yours entered that  
forest. Next a lion threatened, snarling, but I turned him  
back; a most raucous storm blew in with terrifying howls;  
forest fires, ever so like doomsday's conflagration, raged

throughout the land, burning trees in all directions; but, in  
 a moment's time, that companion of the wind<sup>1</sup> went out of  
 its own accord, and the wind god vanished. It was then I  
 saw in front of me a gathering of heavenly maids,  
 sporting in the sylvan grove; with hands cupped reverently, I  
 honored them, begged a boon, my lord, then bid farewell to them  
 30 all. Not far off, a temple shone resplendently within  
 the woods, brightening up that fair land. I descended to the  
 lake, bathed my body, and with a blue lotus offering  
 I worshipped Mother fervently. Māyā appeared before  
 me, granting me a boon. Said that lady of compassion,  
 'Most pleased with you today, son of chaste Sumitrā, are all  
 the gods and goddesses. Vāsava has sent you weapons  
 of the gods. On Śiva's orders I myself have come to  
 expedite this task of yours. Take up your godly weapons,  
 warrior, and then with Vibhīṣaṇa traverse the city  
 40 proper to where Rāvaṇi worships Vaiśvānara in  
 the temple of the Nikumbhilā sacrifice. There pounce  
 precipitately on that Rākṣasa, as a tiger  
 strikes, and destroy him. By my boon you two will enter sight  
 unseen; I shall sheath you in a veil of *māyā*, like a  
 sword inside its scabbard. Now go with a stout heart, you of  
 renown.' Tell me, what is your wish, O jewel among men?

Night departs, and we must not delay. Shall I slay that son  
of Rāvaṇa, my lordship, please command this slave of yours!"

50 The Raghu lord replied, "Alas, how — when living beings,  
panic-stricken, run panting for their lives with wind's speed on  
seeing in the distance that messenger of Death, by whose  
venom gods and men alike are reduced to ashes — how  
can I send you into such a serpent's hole, you who are  
more than life to me? Sītā's rescue is not to be. For  
naught, Ocean, did I shackle you, slay countless Rākṣasas  
in war, and bring that Indra among kings with retinue  
and army to this golden Laṅkā. Alas, for no good  
cause at all did bloody torrents, the likes of rain, drench this  
earth. Kingdom, wealth, father, mother, kin and comrade — by quirk  
60 of luck I lost them all. All I had left in my darkened  
room was the lamp, Maithilī; now misfortune (ah Fate, by  
what fault am I deemed guilty at your feet?) has extinguished  
even that. Who is there left in my line, Brother, whose face  
I can gaze upon and by so doing sustain this life  
of mine? Shall I live on in this mortal world? Come, let us  
once again return, Lakṣmaṇa, to our forest refuge.  
At an inauspicious time, befuddled by the lure of  
Hope, we came, Brother, to this city of the Rākṣasas."

Saumitri the lion answered with a warrior's brashness,

70 "What makes you, Raghu lord, so fearful? In all three worlds whom  
 should that hero fear who has in his possession godly  
 powers? Sahasrākṣa, the gods' sovereign, takes your side, so  
 too does Virūpākṣa, that denizen of Kailāsa,  
 and the maiden of the mountain, his ever faithful wife.  
 Look there, toward Laṅkā—the anger of the gods, like blackened  
 clouds, hovers over golden hues on all four sides. Smiles of  
 the gods, my lord, illuminate this camp of yours, just see!  
 Direct this slave of yours, and I shall take up my godly  
 weapons and march into the Rākṣasa's abode; I shall  
 80 for sure destroy the Rākṣasa, by favor of those feet  
 of yours. You are sage, my lord. Why do you fail to heed the  
 orders of the gods? You always tread *dharma's* path; why then,  
 Aryan, do you today engage in this un-*dharmic*  
 act? Who has kicked the consecrated water pot, and where?"<sup>2</sup>

With honeyed words, the ally, hero Vibhīṣaṇa, spoke,  
 "What he says is true, O charioteer, Indra among  
 Rāghavas. Rāvaṇi, bane of Vāsava and throughout  
 the world invincible, is in prowess like the over-  
 powering messenger of Death. But today it makes no  
 90 sense for us to dread him. In a dream, O jewel of the  
 Raghus, I saw the Rājālakṣmī of the Rākṣasas.  
 Sitting by my head, my lord, and making bright the camp with

her purest rays, that faithful wife addressed this lowly one,

'Alas, Vibhīṣaṇa, your brother is now drunk with pride.

Would I, who abhor defilement, willingly reside in

such a sinful household? Does the lotus ever bloom in

muddy waters? When does one see stars in a cloudy sky?

Due to former deeds of yours, however, the immortals

are favorably disposed toward you. You will inherit the

100 umbrella and the scepter and the vacant kingly throne.

By Fate's decree, I today install you, famed one, as lord

of all the Rākṣasas. This coming day Sumitrā's son,

the lion, will slay your nephew Meghanāda. You will

act as his accomplice. Carry out the gods' command with

care, my future king of Kārbūras.' I awoke and sensed

the entire camp was permeated by a scent from

heaven, and I heard somewhat removed heavenly music,

playing softly in the sky. At the gateway to the camp

I, astounded, saw that charming woman who charms him who

110 inflames Madana.<sup>3</sup> A chignon that resembled massive

clouds hid from view the nape of her neck; in her hair glistened

strings of jewels—ah me! compared to that, lightning's luster

streaking through roiling thunderheads is of small consequence!

Then suddenly Jagadambā vanished. For a time I

stood there staring, thirsty-eyed, but my want was not fulfilled;

Mother did not show herself again. Listen well to all  
 I have to say, charioteer Dāśarathi. Just give  
 the order; I shall go where Rāvaṇi does *pūjā* to  
 god Vaiśvānara in the sacrificial temple. O  
 120 keeper of men, keep strictly to the gods' command. I tell  
 you, your cherished goal will for sure be reached, best Rāghava."

Sītā's husband answered, eyes filled with tears, "When I recall  
 those days gone by, best of Rākṣasas, my troubled heart cries  
 out. How can I cast this jewel of a brother into  
 unplumbed waters? Alas, O friend, when mother Kaikeyī,  
 heartless—it was my bad luck—followed Mantharā's selfish  
 scheme and I, therefore, forsook the comforts of the kingdom  
 to preserve the good name of our father, that fond brother,  
 moved by love for brother, quit the courtly life of his own  
 130 free will. Mother Sumitrā wept. From an upper level  
 in the women's quarters his wife Ūrmilā wailed. And all  
 the other city residents—how can I tell you how  
 much they all pleaded? But he would pay no heed at all to  
 their entreaties. Instead, following behind me (like my  
 very shadow), my brother entered eagerly the woods,  
 freely giving up for good his youthful adolescence.  
 Said mother Sumitrā, 'You steal away my heart's desire,  
 Rāghava. Who knows by what magic's power you have tricked

my baby. Now I must entrust my treasure to your care.

140 Guard prudently this precious gem of mine, I beg of you.'

"Sītā's rescue, best of friends, is not to be. Let us turn  
back to our forest sanctuary. Difficult to beat  
in combat is that Indra among charioteers, that  
Rāvaṇi, bane of gods, Daityas, and of men. Sugrīva,  
Indra of the mighty ones; prince Aṅgada, most learned  
when it comes to warfare; Hanumān, son of the wind and  
strong beyond all measure, like Prabhañjana, his father;  
Dhūmrākṣa, a ball of fire upon the battlefield, most  
comet-like; there is Nala and there Nīla; Keśarī—  
150 a lion of a champion from the vantage of his foes;  
and all the other soldiers, god-like in appearance and  
as heroic as the gods; you, O great charioteer—  
when you with help from all these are unable to defeat  
that Rākṣasa, how then, pray tell, can Lakṣmaṇa engage  
him all by himself? Alas, Hope is a sorceress, I  
tell you, friend, for she is why we leapt across the waters  
that cannot be crossed and came to the Rākṣasas' domain."

Then of a sudden, in the regions of the firmament,  
Sarasvatī, born of the skies, spoke in dulcet tones, "Tell  
160 me, is it proper for you, husband of Vaidehī, to  
doubt the word of gods, you who are the favorite of the

god clan? Why, O hero, do you spurn the gods' advice? Cast  
 a glance into the void." Amazed, the Raghu king saw there  
 a peacock fighting with a snake. The peacock's screeching cries  
 commingled with the hissing of the cobra, filling ten  
 directions with a frightful dissonance. Wings spanned the sky,  
 looking like a mass of clouds; amidst it all flashed *halā-*  
*hala* poison, intense as any fiery holocaust.

170 Both fought fiercely. From fear, the earth began to tremble; the  
 ocean waters constantly were swelling, churning. The next  
 moment that best of peacocks plummeted to earth, quite dead;  
 the reptile hissed loudly—victorious in their struggle.<sup>4</sup>

Said Rāvaṇānuja, "You saw with your own eyes that strange  
 sight; it is not devoid of portent, mark my words, husband  
 of Vaidehī; mull it over! It is no shadow play; the  
 gods have shown you through this *māyā* what will happen—today  
 leonine Saumitri will void Lankā of her hero!"

180 The jewel of the Raghu clan then entered once again  
 his tent and armed his beloved younger brother with those  
 godly weapons. Ah, that handsome warrior cut a gallant  
 figure, looking much like Skanda, the foe of Tāraka.  
 Upon his chest that high-minded one wore a coat of star-  
 studded armor; from his belt there flashed a brilliant saber,  
 embossed with precious stones. Down his back a shield glinted, like



the solar orb itself; beside it swung a quiver made  
of ivory, gold-inlaid, and packed with arrows. In his left  
hand that archer held firm the godly bow; on his head there  
shone a coronet radiating all around (as though  
fashioned from rays of the sun); from that crown bobbed constantly  
190 a tuft of hair, just as a lion's mane bobs loosely on  
the lion's back. Rāghavānuja dressed all excited,  
shining brightly—just like the ray-ringed sun god at high noon.

Hastily that hero left the camp—high spirited, like  
a stallion at the sound of horns when the waves of warfare  
crest and crash! Out went that best of warriors; out with him went  
Vibhīṣaṇa attired in warrior's garb, fearsome when in  
battle! Gods showered them with flowers; auspicious music  
rang across the skies; Apsarās danced throughout the void; earth  
heaven, and the netherworld filled with shouts of "Victory!"

200 Gazing toward the skies, hands cupped in supplication, that best  
of Raghus prayed, "Beggar Rāghava begs for refuge at  
your lotus feet today, Ambikā. Do not forsake, O  
goddess, this humble slave of yours. How hard I have striven,  
Mother, to maintain *dharma*—all this is not unknown to  
those reddened feet of yours. Now, please, let this worthless being  
savor *dharma*'s fruits, O Mṛtyuñjaya's darling. Satī,  
protect my brother—more dear to me than life, this youth, this

Lakṣmaṇa—in his battle with the Rākṣasa. Quell that  
most turbulent Dānava. Save the gods, Nistāriṇī!

210 Preserve your humble subjects, O slayer of the demon  
buffalo; trample under foot the frenzied Rākṣasa!"

In such a manner the enemy of Rākṣasas praised  
Satī. Just as breezes waft a wealth of fragrance into  
royal quarters, so too the air, which carries sound, bore the  
prayer of Rāghava to the residence at Kailāsa.

Indra of the heavens smiled in heaven, and Pavana  
of his own accord moved it swiftly through the carrier  
of sound. On hearing that sweet prayer, Mother—daughter of the  
mountain—overjoyed, said, "Be it so," and gave her blessings.

220 Dawn, she who is dispeller of both gloom and sorrow, flashed  
a smile on the rising-hill, as Hope, indeed, does upon  
a sad heart. Birds cooed in wooded groves, bumblebees darted  
here and there. Night softly sauntered off, taking with her stars;  
splendidly a single star yet shone upon Dawn's forehead  
but shone with all the brilliance of a hundred stars. Flower  
blossoms now bloomed in her tresses—a novel star array.

Turning to that best of Rākṣasas, Rāghava then said—

"Be cautious, friend. The beggar Rāma has entrusted to  
you, best of charioteers, Rāma's priceless gem. No need

230 of further words—my life and death this day are in your hands."

Hero Vibhīṣaṇa reassured the great archer, "You  
are favored by the gods, O jewel of the Raghu clan;  
whom do you have to fear, my lordship? Champion Saumitri  
will, of course, best in combat the champion Meghanāda."

Bowing to those feet of the Indra of the Rāghavas,  
Saumitri started off with his comrade Vibhīṣaṇa.  
Layers of thick clouds enveloped both of them, just as fog  
in the winter season encircles mountain peaks at the  
break of day. Invisible, the two advanced toward Laṅkā.

240 The goddess Māyā stepped into that golden temple where  
Kamalā—Rājalakṣmī of the clan of Rākṣasas,  
dressed in wifely Rākṣasa attire—was seated on her  
lotus throne. Smiling, that Ramā, Keśava's beloved,  
queried, "What brings you on this day, O great goddess, to this  
city? Voluptuous one, please tell me of your wishes."

Answered Māyā, the queen of Śaktis, with a gentle smile,  
"Today hold in check your power, daughter of the ocean;  
god-like charioteer Saumitri will penetrate this  
golden city, and by Śiva's orders that champion will  
250 vanquish haughty Meghanāda in the temple of the  
Nikumbhilā sacrifice. Your radiant power is  
like the fires of annihilation, O radiating  
woman, and hence, what enemy is there capable of

entering this city? Show sympathy to Rāghava,  
 O goddess, I beseech you. Grant him a boon, O wife of  
 Mādhava; spare Rāma, a follower of *dharma*'s path."

With a forlorn sigh, Indirā replied, "Who can fail to  
 heed your word, you who are adored throughout the universe?  
 But my heart cries out as I contemplate all this. Alas,  
 260 that best of Rākṣasas and his consort Mandodarī  
 do my *pūjā* lovingly—what more can I say? True, it  
 is through his own fault that the wealth of Rākṣasas is lost.  
 I shall therefore hold in check my power, goddess, for how  
 can I impede the course of destiny? Tell Saumitri  
 he may enter, without fear, the city. Appeased, I grant  
 him this boon: may Sumitrā's hero son in the coming  
 battle best the foe-defeating son of Mandodarī."

To the western gate walked Keśava's desire—most fetching,  
 she, like a full-blown bloom at dawn cleansed by dewdrops. With that  
 270 pretty one went Māyā. Succulent banana saplings  
 withered; auspicious water pots shattered on their own; the  
 waters of this world went dry. For, that sustaining power  
 blended then and there with the red lac dye which lined her feet,  
 as at Night's departure the gossamer of nectar moon-  
 beams blends into the net of solar rays. Laṅkā's beauty  
 faded, ah! as when the jewel on the forehead of the

cobra's mate is lost. Afar, clouds of a sudden rumbled  
 loudly; the sky wept rain; the lord of waters tossed and turned;  
 mother earth quaked violently, lamenting, "Oh, my city  
 280 of the Rākṣasas, this plight of yours—you who used to be,  
 O golden lady, the very ornament of this world!"

The two of them climbed the city ramparts and viewed not far  
 away god-like Saumitri, like sun-god Tviṣāmpati,  
 veiled in fog, or like the lord of fire, that Vibhāvasu,  
 cloaked in billowing smoke. Alongside was charioteer  
 Vibhīṣaṇa—the wind with wind's companion—difficult  
 to overcome in combat. Who could save today, alas,  
 the hope of Rākṣasas, that Rāvaṇi. As the tiger,  
 maneuvering for position, moves under cover of  
 290 the brush when he spots a fine stag off in some dense woods—or  
 as the crocodile, the likes of Yama's discus weapon  
 incarnate, with swiftness glides undetected out toward that  
 distant bather he caught sight of in the middle of the  
 river—so too did champion Lakṣmaṇa with companion  
 Vibhīṣaṇa proceed with speed to slay the Rākṣasa.<sup>5</sup>

With a sigh of resignation and bidding her good-byes  
 to Māyā, pretty Indirā returned to her own home.  
 Mādhava's beloved wept. Mother earth in joy soaked up  
 those teardrops—as oysters suck in tenderly, O cloud maids,

300 water from your eyes and form priceless pearls whose excellence  
is born when chaste Svātī shines in the circle of the sky.

By the strength of Māyā's power, that pair of warriors marched  
into the city. At Saumitri's touch the portals flew  
wide open with a thunderous clatter, but whose ears did  
that racket reach? Alas! all Rākṣasa charioteers  
were made deaf by Māyā's trickery; none saw those foemen,  
like Kṛtānta's messengers, overpowering, serpents  
slithering slyly into a bed of blooming flowers.

Quite surprised, Rāmānuja gazed all around and saw a  
310 force of four divisions at the gateway—mahouts on their  
elephants, horsemen on their steeds, great charioteers in  
chariots, and on the ground foot soldiers, messengers of  
Śamana—fearsome, like Bhīma, unbeatable in war.  
A glow like creation's final fire filled the firmament.

Nervously the heroes gazed upon the all-consuming  
blazing Virūpākṣa, a stellar Rākṣasa, who held  
a *prakṣvedana* weapon and rode astride a golden  
chariot. There stood the champion Tālajaṅghā, as tall  
as a *tāla* palm—like a Gadādhara, enemy  
320 of Mura. And there was Kālanemi upon the back  
of an elephant, a warrior with the power to deal  
death to foes. Fond of the fight and deft as well, Pramatta

stayed besotted always on the liquor of heroics.  
 Cikṣura, a Rākṣasa who seemed an equal to the  
 sovereign of the Yakṣas—and there were other mighty  
 heroes, terrors all to gods, Daityas, and mankind. Calmly,  
 with utmost care, the two proceeded. Saumitri, silent,  
 observed on either side of them hundreds and hundreds of  
 golden temples, shops and gardens, ponds and fountains; stabled  
 330 horses, elephants within stalls; countless chariots the  
 hue of fire; arsenals; and charming theaters adorned  
 with precious stones, ah yes! just as in the city of the  
 gods! Who is able to describe Laṅkā's many riches—  
 the envy of the gods! coveted by Daityas! who can  
 count the jewels in the ocean or stars throughout the sky!

Within the city those champions gaped in rapt attention  
 at the Rākṣasa king's palace. Golden colonnades and  
 diamond columns glistened; the pinnacles protruding from  
 that edifice reached the sky, resplendent like the peaks of  
 340 Mount Hemakūṭa. Ivory embossed with the charm of gold  
 enhanced the windows and the doors, a delight to the eye,  
 looking splendidly like shafts of sun at daybreak on a  
 mound of snow. That much celebrated Saumitri stared in  
 stupefaction, then spoke to friend Vibhīṣaṇa, Indra  
 of champions, "Among monarchs, your elder brother is to

be praised, best of Rākṣasas, a sea of glory in this  
world. Ah, who owns such riches on the surface of this earth!"

350 With a dejected sigh hero Vibhīṣaṇa spoke, "You  
are right, gemstone of champions. Who, alas, does indeed own  
such riches on the surface of this earth? But nothing is  
forever in this mundane life. One goes, another comes—  
that is the way of the world, just like waves upon the sea.  
Come quickly, O best of charioteers, and carry out  
this day the slaying of Meghanāda; gain for yourself  
immortality, my lord, by drinking fame's elixir."

The two moved posthaste, unseen, by the grace of Māyā.  
Hero Lakṣmaṇa watched wives of Rākṣasas—who even  
put to shame doe-eyed lovelies—on the bank of a pond, gold  
water jugs perched on their hips, sweet smiles upon their honeyed  
360 lips. Lotus flowers bloomed in lakes that morn. Here and there a  
charioteer of imposing stature would emerge. Foot  
soldiers, decked out in iron armor, left their flowered beds.  
Someone blew a conch shell brazenly, putting all at once  
an end to sleep. Syces saddled up their mounts. Elephants  
trumpeted loudly, trunks flaunting *mudgaras*, on their backs  
resplendent silk trappings, fringed with pearl pendants. Chariot  
drivers loaded diverse weaponry and golden banners  
carefully onto their chariots. Enchanting morning



music could be heard within the many temples, ah me,  
 370 just like that played in homes throughout Bengal during *dola*  
 when all the gods appear on earth to worship Rāmā's mate!  
 Flower-maids sauntered to and fro, gathering flower blooms,  
 filling all the paths with floral scents and brightening with  
 color their surroundings, just like Dawn, friend of the flowers.  
 Elsewhere others scurried here, now there, bearing loads of milk  
 and yogurt. Gradually the hustle and bustle and the  
 noise intensified as townsfolk woke throughout that city.

Someone said, "Come, let us mount the wall. If we fail to get  
 there early, we shall not secure a spot where from to view  
 380 the spectacular fight. I wish to soothe my eyes upon  
 our prince in martial garb and all those other excellent  
 warriors." Another answered boastfully, "What is the point,  
 I ask you, of ascending the city walls? Our prince will  
 best both Rāma and his younger brother Lakṣmaṇa in  
 an instant, for who in the world can stand his ground against  
 those arrows? Our enemy subduer will burn his way  
 through the opposition forces just as fire rages through  
 dry grasses. He will strike his uncle Vibhīṣaṇa a  
 frightful blow, then manacle that cur. Surely the victor  
 390 will come to the assembly hall to receive his royal  
 favors, so let us head for that assembly hall ourselves."

What more shall the poet say of all that hero saw and  
 heard. Smiling inwardly, the famous one, divinely brave  
 like a god himself and bearing godly weapons, moved on,  
 followed by charioteer Vibhīṣaṇa. Close ahead  
 there shone the temple of the Nikumbhilā sacrifice.

Upon a cushion made of *kuśa* grass sat Indrajit  
 worshipping his chosen deity in private, clad in  
 silken clothes with a shawl made of the same, on his forehead  
 400 a mark of paste made from sandalwood, around his neck, a  
 garland. Incense smoldered in a censer; all about burned  
 lanterns fueled with purified ghee. There were heaps of flower  
 blossoms and a *koṣā-koṣī* dish and spoon, fashioned from  
 rhinoceros horn and filled with you, O Jāhnavī, your  
 water, you destroyer of defilement! To one side lay  
 a golden bell and sundry offerings on a golden  
 platter. The door was closed. All alone, the Indra among  
 charioteers sat in a trance as though Candracūḍa—  
 Indra among yogis—O Mount Kailāsa, on your crest!

410 As a tiger, driven by hunger, enters like Yama's  
 messenger a cow shed, so fierce-limbed Lakṣmaṇa entered  
 that god's house by Māyā's power. His sword clattered in its  
 scabbard; shield and quiver clanged together violently; the  
 temple trembled underneath the weight of that warrior's feet.

Startled, Rāvaṇi opened wide his eyes. The hero saw  
in front of him a god-like charioteer—brilliantly  
coruscating like the ray-ringed solar god at midday!

Prostrating himself in obeisance, the champion, with hands  
cupped in supplication, said, "O Vibhāvasu, at a  
420 most auspicious time your humble slave worshipped you today;  
and thus, my lord, you sanctified this Laṅkā with the touch  
of your two feet. But, for what reason, tell me, brilliant one,  
have you come disguised as the mortal Lakṣmaṇa, foe of  
Rākṣasas, to grace your devotee? What is this *lilā*  
of yours, shining one?" Again that hero bowed to the ground.

Dreadful Dāśarathi, with a warrior's daring, answered,  
"I am not god Vibhāvasu. Observe well, Rāvaṇi.  
Lakṣmaṇa is my name, born to the Raghu clan. I have  
come here, lion of all warriors, to vanquish you in war;  
430 do battle with me instantly!" As a wayfarer stands  
transfixed with terror if suddenly he sees upon his  
path the king cobra, hood raised, just so that hero stared in  
Lakṣmaṇa's direction. A fearless heart today had just  
turned fearful! a lump of iron melted from high heat, ah  
yes! the sun, by Rāhu, had been swallowed, darkening that  
mass of brilliance of a sudden! summer's heat dried up the  
lord of waters! by stealth, Kali entered Nala's body!

Astonished, the champion spoke, "If truly you are Rāma's  
 younger brother, then tell me, charioteer, by what guile  
 440 did you penetrate today the city of the king of  
 Rākṣasas? There are hundreds and hundreds of Rākṣasas—  
 in power the terror of the Yakṣa sovereign— who, with  
 fearsome weaponry in hand, guard the city gates. The high  
 walls of this city are like mountains; upon those ramparts  
 pace ten thousand soldiers, like deadly discus weapons. By  
 what strength of *māyā*, hero, did you fool them all? Who is  
 the charioteer throughout this universe, born of gods  
 or of men, who single-handedly could defend himself  
 against that throng of Rākṣasas in battle? Why then do  
 450 you mislead me, your humble servant, with this illusion;  
 tell this slave that, Sarvabhuk! What grand jest is this of yours,  
 O jester? Saumitri is no formless god; how could he  
 penetrate this temple? Look there, the door is still now closed.  
 Your lordship, grant this devotee of yours a boon that I  
 may free Lankā of her fears by slaying Rāghava this  
 day, that I may drive away the ruler of Kiṣkindhyā,  
 and that I might offer shackled at the feet of our great  
 king the traitor Vibhīṣaṇa. Hear that, everywhere horn  
 blowers sound their war horns. Were I to tarry, those troops of  
 460 Rākṣasas would become dispirited; bid me farewell."

Responded god-like leonine Saumitri, "I am your  
 god of death, unruly Rāvaṇi! That serpent slithers  
 through the grass to bite him whose time has come! You are ever  
 drunk with pride; made hero by the power of the gods, you,  
 fool, constantly disdain those gods! You are undone at last,  
 rank one. By order of the gods, I challenge you to fight!"

So saying, the hero boldly bared his sword. Dazzling the  
 eye with the brilliance of the fire that ends the world, that most  
 excellent of sabers glinted, as do lightning-flash-filled  
 470 thunderbolts in the hands of Śakra. Then said the son of  
 Rāvaṇa, "If truly you are Rāmānuja, the fierce-  
 armed Lakṣmaṇa, then I shall certainly oblige your wish  
 for war with war; is ever Indrajit dissuaded from  
 the battlefield? But first accept my hospitality,  
 champion supreme, and abide within this edifice—you  
 may be the enemy of Rākṣasas, yet now you are  
 my guest. I shall dress myself in warrior's garb, for it is  
 not the practice, among the brotherhood of warriors, to  
 strike an unarmed foe. This code of conduct, best of warriors,  
 480 is not unknown to you, Kṣatriya—need I say more?"

In a voice like that of thunder, Saumitri spoke, "Once he  
 has caught a tiger in his snare, does the hunter ever  
 set him free? I shall slay you here and now, you imbecile,

in like fashion. You were born among the Rākṣasas, O  
evildoer; why with you should I heed the *dharma* of  
Kṣatriyas? I slay a foe by whatever means I can."

490 Said the conqueror of Vāsava, (like Abhimanyu,  
seeing all the seven champions, that champion, out of rage,  
became the very essence of some molten iron), "You  
are a blemish on the brotherhood of Kṣatriyas, fie  
on you a hundredfold, Lakṣmaṇa. You are without shame.  
Were the Kṣatriya fraternity to hear your name, in  
disgust those charioteers would place hands over ears. You  
stole into this temple in the manner of a thief; like  
a thief, you I shall punish. Were a snake to steal into  
the nest of Garuḍa, would he again return to his  
own hole, you reprobate? Who has brought you here, foul fellow?"

500 In the twinkling of an eye the strong-limbed one picked up the  
*koṣā* dish and hurled it with a dreadful roar at the head  
of Lakṣmaṇa. To the ground the hero crashed, felled by that  
horrific missile, as the king of trees falls crashing from  
the force of the lord of winds. His godly weapons clattered,  
and the temple shook as though caught in a violent earthquake.  
There flowed a rivulet of blood. Quickly Indrajit seized  
the godly sword—but was incapable of lifting it.  
He grabbed the bow, drew it toward him, but the bow stayed steadfast

in Saumitri's grasp. Furious, he then clasped the shield, but  
 his strength proved powerless to carry out that task. As, in  
 vain, an elephant tugs at mountain peaks, his trunk wrapped round,  
 510 so tugged that Indra among champions at the quiver. Who  
 in the world comprehends Māyā's *māyā*! That proud one stared  
 at the door, defiant, in a rush of temper. Startled,  
 that best of warriors saw before him—a tremendous pike  
 in hand and looking like some Dhūmaketu—his uncle  
 Vibhīṣaṇa, a one most formidable in warfare.

"At last," the foe-conqueror said sadly, "I realize  
 how this Lakṣmaṇa gained entry to the city of the  
 Rākṣasas. Alas, O uncle, was such conduct proper  
 on your part, you whose mother is chaste Nikaṣā, you who  
 520 are blood brother to the greatest of the Rākṣasas? and  
 to Kumbhakarṇa, the very image of the trident-  
 wielding Śambhu? and whose nephew has bested Vāsava?  
 You show the way to your own home, uncle, to a thief? You  
 seat a lowly Caṇḍāla in the residence of kings?  
 But I do not rebuke you, for you are one who is to  
 be revered, one comparable to my own father. Please step  
 aside from the doorway. I shall go to the armory,  
 then shall send Rāmānuja to the place of Śamana.  
 Today I shall expunge in war Laṅkā's ignominy."

530                    Replied Vibhīṣaṇa, "Your efforts will prove futile, my  
 knowing lad. It is Rāghava I serve; how could I do  
 him harm, whom I am asked to guard?" Rāvaṇi responded  
 deferentially, "O brother of my father, your words  
 make me wish to die. You, the slave of Rāghava? How do  
 you bring such language to your lips, O uncle, please tell that  
 to this thrall of yours. Fate has set the crescent moon upon  
 the brow of Sthāṇu—does that moon ever plummet to earth  
 to wallow in the dust? O Rākṣasa charioteer,  
 how could you forget who you are? into what exalted  
 540                    clan you were born? Who is that lowly Rāma after all?  
 The regal geese sport upon a crystal lake among the  
 lotuses— my lordship, do they ever go paddle into  
 muddy waters, home of algae scum? The lion, Indra  
 of the beasts, when does he ever, O you lion among  
 warriors, address the jackal as a friend? He is but a  
 dumb dog, and you, most wise; nothing is beyond the ken of  
 those feet of yours. He is just a little-minded mortal,  
 O champion, this Lakṣmaṇa; if that were not the case, would  
 he have called an unarmed soldier to do battle? Now tell  
 550                    me, grand charioteer, is this the *dharma* seemly to  
 grand charioteers? There is no child in Laṅkā who would  
 not laugh at such a claim. Out of my way. I shall be back



soon enough. We shall see today by what godly force this  
 foul Saumitri fends me off in combat. In battles with  
 gods, Daityas, and with men, you have seen through your own eyes, O  
 best of Rākṣasas, the prowess of your humble servant.  
 Shall we see if your slave shies from such a puny human  
 being? That braggart, insolent, entered here, this temple  
 of the Nikumbhilā sacrifice—command your thrall and  
 560 I shall make the worthless mortal pay. Into the city  
 of your birth, uncle, that forest dweller has set foot. O  
 Providence, do depraved Daityas stroll in paradise's  
 Nandana garden? Is the blooming lotus an abode  
 for worms? Tell me, uncle, how am I to tolerate an  
 affront like this—I, who am your brother's son? And you, too,  
 O jewel among Rākṣasas, how do you abide it?"

As when a snake is made to bow its upraised head by the  
 power of a mighty *mantra*, just so, shame-faced and glum,  
 that charioteer, Rāvaṇa's younger brother, answered,  
 570 glancing at the son of Rāvaṇa. "I am not to blame,  
 my child. You rebuke me all for naught. By the error of  
 his deeds, alas, has our king brought ruin on this golden  
 Laṅkā, and destroyed himself. The god clan religiously  
 abstains from sin, but Laṅkā city overflows with it.

And Laṅkā sinks within these blackened waters, just as earth

will do, come Pralaya. That is why, for protection, I  
 have sought the refuge of the feet of Rāghava. Who is  
 there who wants to drown for the wayward ways of someone else?"

580 The bane of Vāsava grew livid. Gravely, as when the  
 Indra among clouds rumbles angrily in the sky at  
 midnight, that Indra among warriors spoke, "You who follow  
*dharma's* path, younger brother of the king of Rākṣasas,  
 are renowned throughout the world—according to what *dharma*,  
 pray do tell this humble servant, please, let me hear, did you  
 abandon all of these—your kin, your caste, your brothers? It  
 says in the learned books that even if outsiders are  
 with virtue and your people virtueless, still then your own,  
 devoid of virtue, are to be preferred—outsiders are  
 forever only that. Where, O best of Rākṣasas, did  
 590 you learn this lesson? But I, in vain, do reprimand you.  
 In such company, O brother of my father, why would  
 you not but learn barbarity? He who travels with the  
 lowest of the low becomes himself a lowly creature."

At this point, through the care of Māyā, Saumitri regained  
 consciousness and, with a roar, that hero twanged his bowstring.  
 Taking aim that champion pierced foe-besting Indrajit with  
 the keenest of his arrows, just as the enemy of  
 Tāraka, the great archer, pierced Tāraka with a hail

of arrows. Alas, there flowed a rivulet of blood (just  
 600 as a stream of water courses down the body of a  
 mountain in the monsoon season), moistening his clothes and  
 muddying the ground. That charioteer, beside himself  
 with pain, snatched up the conch shell, bell, the plate of offerings,  
 whatever was within the temple, and enraged hurled them  
 one by one—as charioteer Abhimanyu, unarmed  
 against the strength of arms of seven charioteers, threw  
 first the crests of chariots, their wheels, then broken swords, torn  
 leather shields, pierced armor, whatever he could lay his hands  
 upon. But illusive Māyā, stretching out her arms, caused  
 610 all those things to fall wide of the mark, just as a mother  
 brushes back mosquitoes swarming round her sleeping son with  
 a wave of her lotus-like hand. Enraged, Rāvaṇi ran  
 at Lakṣmaṇa, letting out a wild roar, like a lion  
 challenging the beaters there before him.<sup>6</sup> But because of  
 Māyā's *māyā*, in all the four directions that hero  
 saw horrific Daṇḍadhara mounted on his monstrous  
 water buffalo; saw Śūlapāṇi with the trident  
 in his grip; saw Caturbhujā with the conch, the discus,  
 and the mace in his four hands; and saw, with trepidation,  
 620 the multitude of the god clan's charioteers in their  
 vehicles from heaven. Dejected, the hero sighed and

stood there enervated, ah me, like the moon when swallowed  
up by Rāhu or like the lion caught within a snare.

Rāmānuja let drop the bow, then bared his wondrous sword;  
the eye was dazzled by light from its broad blade. Alas, the  
blinded conqueror of foes, hero Indrajit, struck by  
that falchion fell upon the ground drenched with blood. Mother earth  
quaked violently; boisterously the ocean swelled. And at once  
the whole universe filled with a stupendous noise. In the  
630 heavens, on the earth, and throughout Pātāla, both mortal  
and immortal beings, in sheer terror, anticipated  
some disaster. There, as the sovereign of the Karbūras  
sat in his courtly hall upon his golden throne, his crown  
of gold of a sudden slipped from his head and tumbled down,  
as the pinnacle on a chariot when severed by  
an opposing charioteer teeters, then falls beneath  
the car. Seized with misgivings, the champion, king of Laṅkā,  
remembered Śaṅkara. Pramīlā's right eye slightly twitched.<sup>7</sup>  
Absentmindedly, alas, that chaste wife, unawares, wiped  
640 the vermilion from her pretty forehead.<sup>8</sup> For no reason,  
Mandodarī, queen consort of the Rākṣasas, swooned. And,  
asleep in their mothers' laps, babies cried mournful wails, just  
as Vraja's children cried the time their precious Śyāma made  
the land of Vraja dark, setting off for Madhupura.

Felled in unfair combat, that foeman of the Asuras'  
foes, that hope of the Rākṣasa clan, addressed the champion  
Lakṣmaṇa with harsh words, "Disgrace to the community  
of warriors, you, Sumitrā's son! Shame on you a hundred  
times! I, the son of Rāvaṇa, fear not Śamana. But  
650 what will be an eternal sorrow in my heart, base one,  
is that by a blow from your weapon I shall die today.  
I—who in pitched battle subdued Indra, the subduer  
of the clan of Daityas—am to die now by your hand? For  
what false step has Providence meted out such punishment  
upon this humble servant—shall I ever understand?  
What else can I say to you? When the lord of Rākṣasas  
gets word of this, who will save you, O meanest of all men?  
Even though you plunge into the sea's unfathomed waters,  
our sovereign's wrath will navigate to that domain—burning  
660 like Vāḍaba. That rage of his, like a forest fire, will  
incinerate you in the woods, if you flee into the  
forest, you beastly thing. Even Night, you fool, will not be  
capable of hiding you. Dānava, divine, or man—  
who is fit to rescue you, Saumitri, when Rāvaṇa  
is angered? Who in the world will wipe away your blemish,  
blemished one?" Saying this, that noble-minded one recalled  
with sadness in those final moments the lotus feet of

both his mother and his father. Anxious, he grew calm as  
 he thought of Pramīlā, his eternal bliss. Tears blended  
 670 with his blood as both flowed freely, alas, dampening the  
 earth. The sun to lotus Laṅkā had reached his setting-hill.  
 Like dying embers or gentle rays of Tviṣāmpati,  
 just so the mighty one lay on the surface of the earth.

His eyes awash with tears, Rāvaṇa's younger brother spoke,  
 "You who always rest on finest silken bedding, fierce-armed  
 one, from what aversion do you lie now on the ground? What  
 would the king of Rākṣasas now say, were he to see you  
 lying on such bedding? and Mandodarī, chief queen of  
 the Rākṣasas? and pretty Pramīlā whose countenance  
 680 is like that of the moon of autumn? and all of Diti's  
 daughters, who in beauty shame the godly maidens? and chaste  
 Nikaṣā, your aged grandmama? What will they all say,  
 the clan of Rākṣasas, and you, the crown-gem of that clan?  
 Get up, dear lad. It is I, your uncle, calling you—I,  
 Vibhīṣaṇa! Why do you not pay heed, you who are more  
 dear than life to me? Arise, dear boy, I shall open wide  
 the door immediately, as you requested. Proceed now  
 to the armory, efface today in battle Laṅkā's  
 stain. O pride of Karbūras, does the ray-ringed solar god,  
 690 delight to eyes of all the world, ever go beyond the

setting-hill at noon? Then why today do you, dressed as you  
 are, famed one, lie upon the ground? The horns blow, listen there,  
 they call to you; the king of elephants is trumpeting;  
 horses whinny shrilly; armed is the Rākṣasas army,  
 an Ugracaṇḍā when it comes to war. The enemy  
 is at the city gates, get up, foe-conqueror. Preserve  
 the prestige of this clan of ours in the coming battle."

In such a manner hero Vibhīṣaṇa wailed with grief.

Saddened by his comrade's sadness, leonine Saumitri  
 700 spoke, "Restrain your sorrow, crown-gem of Rākṣasas. What is  
 the purpose of such fruitless lamentation? It was Fate's  
 decree that I slay this soldier; you are not to blame. Come,  
 let us now return to camp where Cintāmaṇi worries,  
 separated from his humble servant. Listen well, O  
 champion, auspicious music emanates from the homes of  
 heavenly beings." The best of charioteers then heard  
 celestial melodies, most enchanting, like in a dream.  
 The two left hurriedly, just as a hunter, when he slays  
 the young of a tigress in her absence, flees for his life  
 710 with wind's speed, panting breathlessly, lest that ferocious beast  
 should suddenly attack, wild with grief at finding her cubs  
 lifeless! or, as champion Asvatthāmā, son of Droṇa,  
 having killed five sleeping boys inside the Pāṇḍava camp

in dead of night, departed going with the quickness of  
 a heart's desire, giddy from the thrill and fear, to where lay  
 Kuru monarch Duryodhana, his thigh broken in the  
 Kurukṣetra war! They both traveled unseen, by Māyā's  
 grace, to where the champion, the joy of Maithilī, was camped.

720           Bowling to those lotus feet, Saumitri the lion spoke  
 with utmost deference the following, hands together,  
 "By the grace of your two feet, jewel of the Raghu clan,  
 this humble slave proved superior to the Rākṣasa  
 in combat. Meghanāda—that hero, that conqueror  
 of Śakra—is no more." Then planting a kiss atop his  
 younger brother's head and hugging him affectionately,  
 his lordship spoke, eyes wet with tears, "I have gained again this  
 day by your strength of arms my Sitā, O Indra of great  
 physical prowess. You, of all the heroes, are to be  
 most lauded. Praise be to mother Sumitrā. Praise to your  
 730           father Daśaratha, the progenitor of you and  
 most valued of the Raghu clan. Fortunate am I, your  
 elder brother; lucky is your place of birth, Ayodhyā.  
 This fame of yours will be proclaimed throughout the world for all  
 time to come. But remember, offer *pūjā* to the strength-  
 bestowing gods, my fondest one. Man is forever weak  
 when dependent on his own strength only; and if success



is realized, it is by the good graces of the gods."

Addressing Vibhīṣaṇa, ally supreme, the husband  
of Vaidehī intoned warmly, "At a most auspicious  
740 moment, O companion, I came upon you in this land  
of Rākṣasas. You, in the guise of a Rākṣasa, are  
good fortune for the Rāghavas. You today have placed  
the clan of Rāghavas in your debt by your merit, gem  
of merit. As the king of planets is the monarch of  
the day, so too, I say to you, the king of friends is you.  
Come everyone, worship her who is beneficent, that  
Śaṅkarī." And from the sky the gods in great delight rained  
down blossoms. Jubilant, the army bellowed, "Hail, spouse of  
Sītā!" In terror, golden Laṅkā woke to peals of glee.

750

Thus ends canto number six,

called "the slaying,"

in the poem

*The Slaying of Meghanāda.*