When in face-to-face combat Vīrabāhu, crown-gem of warriors, fell and went before his time to Yama's city—
speak, O goddess of ambrosial speech—which best of warriors did the foe of Rāghava, treasure-trove among that clan of Rākṣasas, designate commander, then send fresh to the battle? And by what stratagem did he, the joy of Urmiḷā, destroy the hope of the Rākṣasas, Indra's conqueror, that Meghanāda—invincible throughout the world—and thus free Indra from his terror? I, who am ignorant, praise your lotus feet and call upon you once more, white-limbed Bhārati! Come, chaste woman, favor me, your servant, as you came and sat once on Vālmiki's tongue (as though upon a lotus-throne), Mother, when that fowler deep in the forest with a keen arrow pierced the heron perched beside his mate. Who in this world comprehends your greatness? That most mean of men, who robbed, was made immortal, by your grace, like Umā's husband, Mrtyuñjaya! O Varadā, by a boon of yours that thieving Ratnakara came to be the poet of a mine of poetry! At your touch, a poison-tree can endue the splendor of a graceful sandalwood! Alas, Mother, is there like virtue in this slave? Yet, a mother's love reaches out as strongly to that dearest of her children who lacks talent, is slow of wit.
Come from on high, compassionate one, appear, enticer
of the universe! Let me, Mother, sing this epic song
filled with virile rasa. Grant this thrall the shadow of your
feet. You come also, goddess, you who are the honeybee
Imagination! Glean honey from the flower garden
of the poet’s mind and form your honeycomb from which the
folks of Gauḍa might in bliss sip nectar ever after.

Upon his golden throne sat warrior Daśāṇana—a
mass of brilliance, like the highest peak upon gold-crested
Hemakūṭa mountain. Ministers, counselors, and the
like by the hundreds sat about, bowed humbly. It was a
court unequaled on this earth—made of crystal. In it, gems
shone brightly, as bloom lush lotuses in Lake Mānasa.
White, red, blue, and yellow pillars, row on row, held aloft
an aurous ceiling, as the Indra among snakes\(^1\) spreading
his ten thousand cobra-hoods, obligingly supports the
world. From its valance sparkling diamonds, emeralds, rubies, pearls
dangled, as dangle leafy garlands (intertwined with buds
and blossoms) from a temple. A gem-born luster smiled like
lightning—blinding! Sweet-eyed slave girls waved artful yak-tail whisks;
those moon-faced maids swayed lotus-stem-like arms ecstatically
forth and back. The umbrella-bearer held the parasol;
ah, just as Kāma might have stood in Hara’s anger’s flame,
unburned, so he stood on the floor of that assembly hall,
as bearer of the royal parasol. Before its doors
paced the guard, a redoubtable figure, like god Rudra,
trident clutched, before the Pāṇḍavas' encampment's gateway!
Constant spring breezes delicately wafted scents, gaily
transporting waves of chirping, ah yes! enchanting as the
flute's melodic undulations in the pleasure groves of
Gokula! Compared to such an edifice, O Maya,
Dānava lord, how paltry was
that jeweled court built at
Indra-prastha with your own hands to please the Pauravas!

In such a court as this there sat the sovereign Rākṣasa,
struck dumb with grief for his son! Tears trickled in endless streams—
dampening his raiment, just as a tree, when its sap-filled
trunk is stricken by sharp arrows, cries silently. In front
of him, palms together, stood the bearer of bad tidings,
ashen gray from dust, his entire body moist with blood. From
the many hundred soldiers who waded into warfare's
sea in the company of Vīrabāhu, only this
one warrior came ashore. That Rākṣasa, spared death's black waves
which had engulfed all the others, was called Makarākṣa—
in strength he matched the Yakṣas' lord. When he learned of his son's
death from this messenger, alas, Naikaṣeya, jewel
among kings, was overcome with gloom that day! Those in the
royal court were saddened by their ruler's grief. His world went
dark, ah me, as does the world at large when the lord of day
is screened off by clouds! But upon regaining consciousness
moments later, Rāvana, sighing, spoke dejectedly,

"This news of yours, messenger, is like a nightmare! Beggar
Rāghava in face-to-face battle slew the archer who,
by his strength of arms, has harassed even the immortals?
Did Providence, with flower petals, chop down so stately
a śālmalī tree? — Ah son, Virabāhu, crown-gem of
warriors! for what sin have I lost a treasure such as you?
what fault of mine did you observe, harsh Fate, for which you stole
my wealth? Alas, how am I to bear this anguish? Who else
now will uphold the honor of our clan in this black war!
As in the depths of the forest a woodsman first trims limbs
one by one before the tree is felled, O Providence, so
too does this most forbidding enemy, as you observe,
hack at me relentlessly! I shall be toppled, roots and
all, by his arrows! Were that not to be, would my brother
Kumbhakarna, trident-bearer Śambhu's very likeness,
have met his death prematurely because of me? and all
those other soldiers—in defense of this Rākṣasa clan?
Alas, Sūrpaṇākhā, at what ill-fated moment did
you, hapless woman, see that snake, full of kālakūṭa
venom, in the fatal Pañcavaṭi forest? At what inauspicious time did I (saddened by your plight) transport to this golden dwelling that flaming beauty, Jānakī?

Ah me, would that I could quit this golden Laṅkā, enter some dense woods, and thereby cool the burning in my heart through solitude! Once my gorgeous city seemed a theater brightly lit by rows of burning lamps and decked with wreaths of flowers! But one by one those flowers wither now, the lamps go out; now silent are the rabāb’s and vīṇā’s strings, the flute and muraja; why then do I linger any longer here? For who is there who likes to dwell in darkness?"

So bemoaned Rāvana, Rākṣasa sovereign, dolefully, like the blind king in Hastinā, alas, when he heard from Sañjaya’s lips how his dearest sons had been slain by blows from fierce-armed Bhimaśena in the Kurukṣetra war.

Then Sārana, his minister (excellent and learned confidant) arose and, hands cupped reverently, began to speak with deference, "O king, renowned all through the world, crest of the Rākṣasa clan, excuse this thrall of yours! for who in the world is meet to counsel you? However, reflect on this, my lordship—when cloud-cleaving pinnacles are crushed to rubble by a strike of lightning, the mountain as a whole is never stirred by that oppression. This earthly world
is full of māyā, its joys and sorrows are all for naught.
Only the foolish are befuddled by illusion's hoax."

Laṅkā's ruler answered, "What you say is very true, Prime Minister Sāraṇa! I know indeed this earthly world is full of māyā, its joys and sorrows all for naught. Yet knowing that, this heart still cries inconsolably. Death has snatched the flower which had bloomed upon the stalk that is my heart; now this deflowered heart is sunk in sorrow's sea like a lotus stalk in water, its blossom-treasure stolen."

And saying thus, the king ordered, with a glance cast toward the messenger, "Tell me, messenger, how did that champion Virabāhu, bane of the immortals, fall in battle?"

Bowing low before the great king's feet, hands joined together, that bearer of bad tidings resumed, "Alas, O Laṅkā's monarch, how shall I recount the peerless tale? how shall I describe Virabāhu's valor? As an elephant in rut wades through a stand of reeds, so too that elephant of archers waded through the enemy ranks. Even now my heart pounds as I recall the way he rampaged! I have heard, O sovereign of the Rākṣasas, thunder's rumble, lions' roar, and ocean waves when they crash; I have seen swift lightning streaks, my lord, run upon the winds. But never have I heard through all three worlds such a dreadful snap and clatter from the
twanging of a bow! nor ever seen such awesome arrows!

"That legion of grand warriors with Virabahu joined the battle, like a herd of elephants with their lordly bull.

Dust rose thick as clouds covering the sky—as though those clouds had come in anger darkening the heavens; a hail of arrows whirred through the air, flashing like lightning's splendor! Praise the skill of Virabahu! who can count the foe who fell!

"In this fashion your son, O king, with his troops fought against the enemy! After some time Raghava, Indra of the mortals, joined the fray, a gold diadem on his head, a tremendous bow in hand, like the bow of Vāsava, studded with a mix of many jewels." So saying, that bearer of bad tidings wept in silence, just as weeps a mourner, reminded of some past heartache! In sympathy, without a sound, the members there assembled also wept.

Teary-eyed, Rāvana, the love of Mandodarī, spoke again, "Speak, news bearer, I must hear; how did the son of Daśaratha slay Daśānana's champion scion?"

"How, O world's sovereign," began once more the bearer of bad tidings, "how, O wealth of Rākṣasas, can I bear to speak of that, or you to listen? Rāmacandra pounced upon your son in battle, as the lion, yellow-eyed, with gaze afire, gnashing wrathfully awful fangs, leaps upon the
nape of a bull's neck! Then all about swelled the waves of war,
like a raucous ocean dueling with the winds! Sabers
flashed, like tips of flames, from amidst ten thousand aligned shields
which resembled smoky billows! Conch shells blared with a roar
like the ocean! What more shall I say, my lord? Through fault from
a former birth, I alone survived! Fie, Providence, for
what sin did you cause such agony for me today? Why
did I not lie upon a bed of arrows on that field

of battle next to Vīrabāhu, the ornament of
golden Laṅkā? But it is not my fault completely. See
this lacerated chest of mine, O gem of kings, caused by
enemy weapons; on my back there are no marks of wounds."

That Rākṣasa was stunned with anguish when he finished what
he had to say. Then Laṅkā's sovereign, as a twinge of pride
and grief shot through his frame, spoke up, "Bravo, messenger! What
brave heart would not yearn to enter battle after hearing
your account? On hearing drumbeats of the double-headed
damaru, does the deadly cobra ever stay at rest
inside his hole? Hail Laṅkā, mother of brave sons! Come—let
us go, my courtiers, and see how Vīrabāhu, crown-
gem of warriors, fell in war; let us gratify our eyes."

That ruler of the Rākṣasas climbed the palace peak, as
the ray-ringled jewel of the day ascends the rising-hill
of gold. On all sides Laṅkā richly shone, crowned with golden mansions—heart-stealing city! Those edifices made from gold were encompassed, ring by ring, with flower gardens; there lay ponds—the homes for lotuses—and silvery fountains, magnificent trees, and floral sprays—pleasing to the sight, like the youth of a young maiden; there were temples topped by diamonds and shops of many hues, adorned with precious stones; it was as though the world had gathered sundry treasured things prescribed for pūjā, then placed them at your feet, O charming Laṅkā, you who are the world's desire, residence of bliss.

The Rākṣasa sovereign scanned the highest walls—like staunchest mountains. Atop, like lions on those mountains, prowled armed guards, drunk on valor. The abductor of Vaidehī viewed four lion-gates² (closed now) where chariots and charioteers, horses, elephants, and troops of countless soldiers stood, poised.

That monarch gazed beyond the city and saw there hostile forces, like grains of sand on some ocean beach, or starry clusters strewn across the circle of the heavens. Encamped before the eastern gateway was the warrior Nila, most difficult to best in warfare; at the southern gate stood Aṅgada, a fighter with unseasoned strength as of an elephant calf or of a poisonous snake who, at the end of winter, sporting new, vivid skin, sidles to and
fro with hood held high—proudly flicking out its trident tongue!

At the northern gate stood guard the king himself, Sugrīva, a lion of a hero. And Dāśarathī watched the western gate—alas, downcast without his Jānaki, like the lotus-pleasing moon without his moonlight!—backed up by Lakṣmaṇa; the wind's son, Hanumān; and best of comrades, Vibhīśaṇa. The opposition ranks had surrounded golden Laṅkā, just as a hunting party deep within the densest jungle, cautiously with teamwork ensnares a lioness—whose form is charming to the eye, whose force is furious, like goddess Bhīmā! The king of Rākṣasas surveyed the nearby battlefield. Jackals, vultures, buzzards, dogs, and bands of ghouls milled about noisily. Some flying, some were squatting, others squabbled. Some would beat their wings to try to scare away their fellow creatures who were just as greedy. Some, bellowing and squawking, giddy with glee, doused their flames of hunger; some sucked rivulets of blood! A herd of elephants had fallen, colossal in bulk; there were horses swift as winds, now, alas, quite still! Countless broken chariots, chariot drivers, mahouts, horsemen, lancers, and troops of soldiers higgledy-piggledy strewn around!

Their armor, shields, sabers, spears, bows, arrows, quivers, cudgels, battle-axes glinted here, there—gem-studded coronets,
turbans, and accouterments, all awe-inspiring. Among
instruments sprawled the musicians. Pennon-bearers, staves with
golden flags in hand, had fallen, struck by Yama's staff. As,
 alas, the gold-tipped harvest harvested by peasants falls
on the field, so the many Rākṣasas had been felled by
arrows of the Rāghava champion, sun among the
solar clan! Likewise Vīrabāhu—crown-gem of warriors—
fell, crushing hostile heroes, as Ghaṭotkaca, raised in
Hiḍimbā's loving nest, like a Garuḍa, had fallen
at the time Karṇa, wielder of Kālapṛṣṭha, let fly
his missile called Ekāghnī to preserve the Kauravas.

Smarting from excruciating sorrow, Rāvana spoke,
"To recline upon the bed on which you lie today, dear
son, is every champion's fervent longing! For who is
there, when quelling foemen, who fears to die to save the land
of one's birth? He who shies away is a craven coward;
shame be his a hundred fold! But, the heart that is addled
by the wine of affection, my dearest one, turns soft like
a flower blossom. Only Antaryāmi knows how faint
mine is, struck as it is by this lightning bolt. I myself
know not. O Fate, this mortal world is but the playground for
your līlā—can it be you are pleased to witness others'
sufferings? Fathers always grieve for sons' misfortunes—O
you who are the father of the world, is this your nature?

Son! my Virabāhu! lion among Indras among
warriors! how can I, when bereft of you, hold fast to life?"

So lamented Rāvana, Rākṣasa monarch, who then
turned his gaze to stare out toward the distant sea—the home of
makaras. Out there a line of stones firmly bound one to
another floated on the water, like a static string
of clouds. On either side foam-capped waves, like the hooded best
of snakes, surged in endless, grave hissing. Across that well-built
bridge, broad as a royal causeway, flowed a babbling stream of
beings, like water through a channel during monsoon rains.

In a fit of pique proud Rāvana, bull of heroes, called
to the ocean, "What a pretty garland you wear around
your throat today, O Pracetas! Fie on you, lord of the
waters! Does such apparel become you, O you who are
impassable, invincible? is this your jewelry,
alas, O jewel-quarry? By what virtue—speak, sir, for
I would hear—by virtue of what deed did Dāśarathī
buy you? You, the adversary of Prabhañjana, yet
fierce as strong winds yourself! tell me, for what trespass do you
wear this shackle? The juggler fits a chain on a lowly
bear and trots him out for show, but who is capable of
slipping cuffs around the lion's royal paws? This Lañkā,
golden city, shines resplendent on your chest, O husband
of blue waters, like the Kaustubha gem upon the breast
of Mādhava; why toward her today are you so heartless?

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Arise, warrior, with a hero's strength break up this bridge; drown
your shame; cool my searing hurt by scuttling this puissant
enemy of mine beneath unfathomed waters. Do not
tolerate the ugly blemish to remain upon your
forehead, Indra of the waters; I implore you humbly."

Having thus spoken, Rāvana, great king of kings, returned
to his assembly hall and there sat down again on his
golden throne; overwhelmed with sadness, that noble-minded
one remained mute while around him ministers, counselors,
and the like, alas, sat grieving quietly. Suddenly

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at that time, there drifted in from all directions soft sounds
of weeping blended with anklets' tinkling, jingling girdles,
and ominous outcries. Escorted by the golden-limbed
women of her retinue, Queen Citrāṅgadā stepped to
the floor of that assembly—hair, alas, disheveled! her
arms, naked, without bangles, like forest-ornamenting
vines when, in snow, they lack gem-like blossoms! her tear-filled eyes
were as the dewy lotus pads at night! The queen was quite
beside herself, lamenting over Vīrabāhu, as
does a mother bird when some fell snake slips inside her nest
and swallows up her fledglings. A storm of woe blew into
that assembly hall! The womenfolk stood there, appearing
comely as the wives of the divines, their loose and flowing
hair seemed a swirl of clouds, their heaving sighs Pralaya-like
heavy winds, their streams of tears torrential rains, their wailing
moans the thunder's rumble! Lankā's sovereign on his gold throne
was startled. Maidens in attendance, tear-soaked, dropped their yak-
tail whisks; the umbrella-bearer let slip the parasol
and wept; angry and confused, the guardsman unsheathed his dread
sword; and the ministers, the counselors, and members of
the court, alarmed, broke down crying, causing utter havoc.

Some time passed before Citrāṅgadā, the queen, spoke softly,
gazing as she did toward Rāvana, "Compassionate Fate
gave me a gem; but worthless me, I placed it with you for
safekeeping, O jewel of the clan of Rākṣasas, as
a bird keeps its young in the hollow of a tree. Tell me,
where have you stored it, lord of Lankā? where is my priceless
gem? It is a monarch's dharma to safeguard possessions
of the poor. You are the king of kings. Pray tell this lowly
wretch, O monarch, how you kept safe for me that wealth of mine!"

Then hero Daśānana countered, "My love, why in vain
rebuke me! Who ever criticizes one who errs due
to evil forces of the planets, charming one? Alas,
it is Fate's will, my lady, that I must agonize so!

Just look, this golden city, bearer of heroic sons,
is empty now of warriors, as at the height of summer's
heat a garden lacks blossoms, a river wants for water!
Daśaratha's son has left my Laṅkā a shambles as
does a porcupine on entering the bamboo-framed thatched
structure of a pan leaf plantation, trashing it. The sea
wears chains round his leg at his behest! You are consumed by
sorrow for one son, O gentlewoman, but my breast is
sundered both day and night from grieving for a hundred sons!
Alas, dear lady, as strong winds through a forest scatter
cotton-like seeds once pods of the simula split open,
just so these many Rākṣāsas, pinnacles upon our
massive clan, have been scattered in this deadly war. Fate stretched
out its arm to level Laṅkā—this I tell you truly."

The Rākṣasa lord fell silent. Moon-faced Citrāṅgadā,
a Gandharva's daughter, wept, head bent with sadness—alas,
bewildered by memories of that foremost of her sons.
Once more, Dāśarathi's adversary resumed speaking,

"Does such lamentation ever suit you, my good woman?
Your best of sons, who slew his homeland's enemies in war,
has gone to heaven. You are the mother of a hero.
Is it right to grieve a son who died engaged in acts of
heroism? My lineage is glorious this day
because of your son's prowess. Why then are you shedding tears,
you whose face is like the moon, streaked by water from your eyes?"

The charming-eyed Citrāṅgadā replied, "He who slays in
war foemen of his native land was certainly conceived
at an auspicious moment. I hold in high esteem the
lucky woman, that mother of such a bloom of warriors.
But consider, husband, where your Laṅkā lies, how distant
from Ayodhyā city! For what cause, from what greed, do tell,
king, did Rāghava come to this land? Yes, golden Laṅkā
tempts the Indra of divines, is unsurpassed throughout all
the world. Surrounding her gleams an ocean like a wall of
silver. We hear his residence is on the Sarayū's
riverside—that little man. Still, does Dāśarathi war
in hopes of capturing your golden throne? Who, a mere dwarf,
would seek to grasp the moon? So, why do you refer to him
as our homeland's enemy, O hero? A snake's head stays
ever bowed; but if one taps upon it, then with hood raised,
that cobra bites the one who tapped his head. Who, please tell me
this, today in Laṅkā set ablaze the doomsday fire? My
husband, by the very fruits of your own deed, alas, have
you doomed the clan of Rākṣasas and are yourself undone!"

That said, Citrāṅgadā, Vīrabāhu's mother, withdrew
sobbing, with her handmaids, to the inner chambers of the palace. Out of grief and rankled self-esteem that foeman of Rāghava quit his golden throne, roaring fiercely. "At long last," declared the sovereign, "my Laṅkā is destitute of warriors! Whom else shall I send to this black war? Who can hold aloft the honor of the Rākṣasas? I myself shall go. Prepare, Indras among warriors, ornaments of Laṅkā! Let us see how deft he is, this gem of Raghus! Will the world this day be minus Rāvana or Rāma!"

When that son of Nikaśā, lion among champions, had so announced, dundubhi drums-of-war boomed forth from the floor of the assembly with a thunderous roll. At such frightful rumblings the Karbūras, intoxicated on heroism's liquor, equipped themselves, those terrors of gods, Daityas, and of men. From the elephant barn charged a herd of tuskers (in might, most difficult to check, like a stream of rushing water); from the stable pranced a train of horses, necks arched, spiritedly champing at the bit. Gold-crested chariots came wheeling out and cast a glow on the city. Troops of infantry followed, gold turbans wound round their heads, swords in scintillating scabbards; down their backs hung leather shields, impregnable in battle; they brandished cloud-splitting sāla-tree-like lances; iron coats-of-mail
encased their frames. Mahouts appeared like the wielder of the
thunderbolt atop the best of thunderheads; horsemen, like
sons of Aśvini, gripping fearsome javelins and world-
destroying battle-axes—a luster rose within the
sky, as when a forest fire penetrates some wooded land.
Warrior flag-bearers held on high flags of the Rākṣasa
clan, then unfurled the best of banners, embossed with gems, which
seemed to be the wings of Garuḍa as he flew through the
skies. A martial band produced a deep, resounding clangor
all about; horses in formation neighed impatiently;
elephants were bugling; conch shells blared in earnest; and strummed
bowstrings combined with rattling swords to fill one's ears with sounds!

Golden Laṅkā quaked beneath the weight of champions' feet—
the monarch of the waters roared, wroth! That commotion reached
lovely Vāruṇī, seated on her coral throne under
water in a golden lotus garden where she, with pearls,
was putting up her chignon. Startled, that faithful woman
gazed about her. Speaking to her moon-faced handmaid, in sweet
tones she asked, "For what reason, do tell me, please, confidante,
has Pāśi, monarch of the oceans, suddenly become
so very agitated? Look, our pearl-crowned residence
rocks violently. Perhaps those mischievous winds have blown
in again to do battle with the waves. Fie on the god
Prabhañjana! How could that monarch of the winds forget
so quickly his own pledge, my dear. That day in Indra's court
I begged to have him manacle the winds and throw them all
in prison. With a smile that god pleaded then, 'Grant me leave,
O goddess of the waters, that I might frolic always
with your limpid streams, servants of yours on the surface of
the earth—permit me that, and I shall honor ever your
command.' Then and there, confidante, I consented. So why
now do the gusty breezes come today to torment me?"

In reply her attendant babbled, "It is pointless to
accuse Prabhañjana, O queen to Indra of the seas.
This is no storm, but rather, monarch Rāvana at his
palace in golden Laṅkā has assumed a tempest's guise
to deflate in battle the warrior pride of Rāghava."

Vāruṇi spoke once again, "Ah yes, true, my confidante,
Rāvana and Rāma struggle over Vaidehī. The
Rājalakṣmī of the clan of Rākṣasas is my boon
companion. Hurry to her dwelling place; I am eager
to have news of the conflict. Give Kamalā this golden
lotus. Tell her that since she went home, thereby darkening
our ocean dwelling, this flower bloomed where that moon-faced one
had placed her crimson feet while seated on her lotus-throne."

Attendant Muralā, at Vāruṇi's command, surfaced,
bounding from the waters, as leaps a nimble sapharī,
flashing its illusion of shiny, silver-seeming sheen
to the sun. That messengeress reached the lotus-home where
the lotus-lady, love of Keśava, sat upon her
lotus-throne there in Laṅkā city. For just a bit she
paused before the door, to soothe her eyes on the sight in front
of her, charm and grace that would excite the maddener of
Madana. Springtime breezes sauntered there—ever-faithful
followers—murmuring, in hopes of garnering fragrance
from those godly lotus-feet. Bouquets shone resplendently
everywhere, just like congeries of gems in Dhanada's
golden vault. Redolent sandalwood and myrrh smoldered in
a hundred golden censers permeating her temple
with their scents. Upon some platters made of gold were arranged
divers gifts and sundry pūjā offerings. Golden lamps
in a row were alight, each filled with fragrant oils—softly
glowing, like the glow of fireflies up against the full moon’s
radiance! With face averted, moon-faced Indirā sat
glumly—as sat Umā of the moon-like countenance, cheeks
cradled in her palms, when the tenth day of the waxing moon
of Durgā Pūjā dawned, with pangs of separation at
her home in Gauḍa—so sat bright Kamalā, goddess on
her lotus-throne. Can dolor enter such a blossom-heart?
With measured paces, pretty Muralā stepped into the temple; and once inside, that messengeress bowed before the feet of Ramā. Indirā—the Rājalakṣmī of those Rākṣasas—bestowed her blessings, then began to speak,

"What brings you here today, Muralā, please tell me? And where is my most dear companion, that goddess of the waters? I think of her constantly. How could I forget all the kindness faithful Vāruṇī showed to me when I lived with her? Ramā's hopes are domiciled in Hari's breast—still this Ramā managed, though bereft of such a one as Hari, by virtue only of Vāruṇī's salve of love! Tell me, is she well, that bosom friend of mine, the Indrāṇī of the seas?" Beautiful Muralā responded, "Vāruṇī is ensconced safely underneath the waters. Because of Vaidehī, Rāma wars with Rāvana; she is eager to have tidings of the battle. This lotus, O chaste one, it bloomed for joy where you had placed those two reddened feet of yours; and for that reason, Pāśi's consort sends it to you."

With sad sighs, Kamalā, moonlight of Vaikuṇṭha, answered,

"Alas, friend, the prowess of foolish Rāvana day by day erodes, like an ocean's shoreline from the pounding surf. You will be amazed to hear: the hero Kumbhakarna, whose look is ferocious, and Akampana, in warfare
steady as a mountain, fell along with charioteer

Atikāya. Of the many other Rākṣasas, I
am powerless to tell. Virabāhu perished — crown-gem
of warriors; those sounds of weeping that you hear within the
inner quarters, Muralā, issue from Citrāṅgadā,
disquieted by grief felt for her son. I am anxious
to depart this city. My heart breaks when I hear day and
night these women sobbing! In each and every household, there
wails, messengeress, a son-less mother and a widow!"

Asked Muralā, "Tell me, O great goddess, which warrior arms
heroically to fight anew today?" Answered the wife
of Mādhava, "I know not who outfits himself this time.
Muralā, come outside and let us see who goes to war."

With that said, Ramā, escorting Muralā, stepped without,
both appearing like Rākṣasa maidens, habited in
silken garments. Their anklets tinkled sweetly, bangles ringed
their wrists, while eye-bedazzling ornamented girdles drew
attention to those slender waists. Before the temple door
both watched wide rows of soldiers marching down the royal way,
like fleet wind-driven waves across an ocean. Along sped
chariots, their fellies clattered as they rolled. Steeds galloped,
in aspect like a dire storm. Elephants alarmed the
earth by the burden of their feet as they lumbered, vaunting
high their trunks as Daṇḍadhara vaunts his deadly scepter.

Instruments of music blared their resonating tones. Gem-embroidered, rousing banners by the hundreds fluttered. On either side stood the world-enchanting wives of Laṅkā at the windows of their golden dwellings, raining down flower blossoms, calling out their auspicious *ululu* sounds. Said Muralā, gazing at the moon-like face of Indirā,

"Today I witness on the earth heaven's grandeur, goddess!

It seems to me that Vāsava himself, monarch of the skies, entered Laṅkā city with an armed force of the gods.

Speak, kind one, kindly tell me, which charioteers are armed for battle, intoxicated on the wines of valor?"

Said chaste Kamalā of the lotus-eyes, "Alas, my friend, Laṅkā's golden city is without her heroes! They who were the Indras of great charioteers, terrors of gods, Daityas, and of men, have been vanquished in this fight so hard to win! That gem among the Raghus took up the bow at an auspicious time! See there, that charioteer on the gold-crowned chariot, that leader among Rākṣasas is Virūpākṣa, Bhīma's likeness, a warrior who fights armed with iron arrows, difficult to best in war. And there, riding on that elephant, look, it is Kālanemi, *bhindipāla* clenched in fist, a hero who by his strength
metes out death to foes! Look, that horsemen, Tālajaṅghā, a
tāla palm in stature, with club in hand, he resembles
war-club-wielding Murāri! See, Pramatta, drunk on wines
of warfare, and the Rākṣasa Bhiṣana, whose chest is
hard as stone! What more can I say about the others? There
were hundreds of like soldiers who perished in this struggle,
as when Vaiśvānara penetrates a dense forest, stands
of even the most tall among the trees are reduced to
ashes in the course of that horrific conflagration."

Asked messengeress Muralā, "Tell me, goddess-queen, why
do I not see Meghanāda, the charioteer who
in battle bested Indra, that lion—yellow-eyed—of
Rākṣasas? Was he slain, chaste one, in that fatal warfare?"

Replied Ramā of the charming smile, "Perhaps the prince is
strolling leisurely through Pramoda park and does not yet
know Vīrabāhu fell today in battle. Muralā,
go at once to Vāruṇī. Tell her I shall presently
leave this golden city and return to Vaikuṇṭha. Through
his own fault Lāṅkā's ruler comes to ruin. Alas, as
in the monsoon rainy season when a pond of clearest
water is turned turbid by churned mud, just so by sin is
golden Lāṅkā sullied! How am I to stay here any
longer? Go, my friend, to where Vāruṇī is seated on
her coral siege in that pearly home of hers. I shall fetch

Indrajit back to Laṅkā's golden city. The fruits of
a former birth will soon come to fruition in this land."

Bowing to the goddess' feet, then taking leave of her,

Muralā, the winsome messengeress, rose upon the

path of winds, just as a fetching peahen, eyes entranced by

coruscation from the multi-jeweled brilliancy off

Ākhaṇḍala's bow,\(^4\) flies toward an alluring pleasure grove!

That pretty lady reached the ocean's shore, then plunged into

those deep blue waters. In the meantime she, the lotus-eyed

love of Keśava, Lakṣmī of the clan of Rākṣasas,

set out to where far away was Meghanāda, gem of

warriors, bane of Vāsava. Through the void sped Indirā.

Moments later Hṛṣikeśa's sleek-haired darling reached the

place where ever-winning Indrajit was seated. It seemed

a mansion like Vaijayanta—on verandahs rows of

handsome golden pillars topped by diamonds stood, as around

Nandana gardens stands a file of graceful trees. From the

branches cuckoos cooed; bees hummed as they meandered; flower

buds were blooming; leaves were rustling; vernal breezes blew; and

cascades, gurgling, tumbled. As the goddess stepped up to the

palace made of gold, she saw a host of fearsome-looking

women, bows in hand, turn defiantly toward the brilliant
gates. Down each one's back there swung a braid beside her quiver. Like lightning streaks were those plaits, interspersed with jewels—gem- hooded serpents were the arrows in those quivers! Golden coats-of-mail covering high breasts seemed like nets of sunbeams draped upon full-blooming lotuses. The arrows in their quivers were keenly tipped, yet sharper still the darts from their almond eyes. They, intoxicated on youth's liquor, paced like female elephants in heat in spring. Ornamental girdles sonorously jingled from about their well-formed hips; around their ankles anklets tinkled. The muraja, vīnā, flute, and saptasvarā sounded; waves of music, spilled out everywhere, blending with yet other sounds to fill one's mind with rapture. That best of champions dallied with these maids of shapely bodies, just as the lord of night sports with Dakṣa's daughters, or, O Yamunā, daughter of the sun, as the herdsman danced beneath kadamba trees, flute to lips, sporting with the cowherds' wives upon your splendid banks!

Meghanāda's wet nurse had been a Rākṣasi whose name was Prabhāśā. Ramā, wife of Mādhava, took her form, then appeared, clutching in her hand a cane and wearing white.

Rising from his golden throne, Indrajit, lion among Indras among warriors, did obeisance to his nursemaid's feet, then said, "For what reason, Mother, have you come today
to this retreat? Tell me, your humble slave, of Lānkā's weal."

Kissing him atop his head, that daughter of the ocean incognita answered, "Alas! Son, what can I say of golden Lānkā's predicament! In pitched battle hero Vīrabhaḥu, your dear brother, perished! The ruler of the Rākṣasas, mourning, moved by profound grief over him, with his troops readies himself today to fight in person."

That great-armed one, aghast, inquired, "What was that you said, respected lady? Who slew my dearest little brother? When? I bested the best of Raghus in night combat; I cut to pieces the opposing army with a rain of terrorizing arrows. But this news, this strange news, Mother, wherever did you get it; tell this slave of yours at once."

That pretty Indirā, finest jewel of the ocean, answered, "My son, alack! it was that wizardly human, Sītā's husband; though he succumbed to your arrows, yet he revived. So, be quick, uphold the honor of the clan of Rākṣasas in this heinous war, crown-gem of Rākṣasas!"

Full of wrath, great warrior Meghanāda tore apart his garlands, threw away his golden bracelets; lying at his feet, his earrings shone most elegant, like fetching blossoms of aśoka under an aśoka tree! "Fie on me,"

the crown prince chided gravely, "Fie on me! Hostile legions
cincture golden Laṅkā, and here am I midst these charming women! Does this befit a one like me, Indrajit, son of Daśānana? Bring my chariot at once. I shall efface this infamy; I shall slay the enemy throng."

Then that bull among the Indras of the charioteers dressed in warrior's garb, just like the son of Haimavati when he went to conquer Tāraka, the great Asura, or, like Kiriṭi, disguised as Bṛhannalā, when he caparisoned himself beneath the samī tree as a champion, then with Virāṭa's son went to recoup the cow herd. His chariot was cloud colored; its wheels gave off lightning flashes; its pennons looked like Indra's bow; and its steeds were swift of foot. Onto that chariot stepped the crown-gem of warriors with a hero's pride. At such time pretty Pramilā grasped hold her husband's hands (alas, as when a golden vine hugs tight the king of trees) and weeping, that young beauty spoke, "Where, companion of my heart, would you consign your thrall, pray tell me, when you yourself have gone away? How shall this hapless girl abide apart from you? Alas, my lord, when deep within the forest, of her own accord a creeper wraps herself around an elephant's leg and if unwittingly at play the elephant should lumber off, still that lordly bull would have proffered her the refuge of
his feet. So why do you, virtues' fund, deny as much to
this slave of yours today?" Meghanāda smiling answered,
"You have bested Indrajit, my chaste one, and secured him
with firm fetters. Who is able to untie those bonds? I
shall return with haste, pure woman, once I have defeated
Rāghava in combat—by virtue of your purity.

Now bid me farewell, my one whose visage is like the moon's.

On the wind's path there arose, with menacing sounds, that best
of chariots, as though Mount Maināka had spread its gold-
hued wings and flown, lighting up the skies! That Indra among
heroes drew back angrily the bowstring and snapped his bow
with verve, just as the Indra among birds screams threateningly
from within the clouds. Both Laṅkā and the ocean quavered!

Sovereign Rāvaṇa was arming, frenzied with heroic
spirits—martial music blared; elephants were trumpeting;
horses whinnied; both troops on foot and charioteers yelled
with fury; silken banners fluttered; and a golden glow
from armor lifted to the skies. At just that moment the
charioteer Meghanāda arrived in full career.

The Karbūras, out of pride, cheered when they saw their best of
champions. That son, bowing to his father's feet, spoke, palms
pressed together, "O monarch of the clan of Rākṣasas,
what is this I hear, Rāghava though dead is yet alive?
I fail to comprehend such māyā, Father! But, grant me
your permission; I shall topple, roots and all, that wicked
one today! I shall turn him into ashes with deadly
fiery arrows, and with my wind-weapon, blow him away;
or if you wish, I shall place him, bound, at your regal feet."

Embracing the prince and kissing him atop the head, that
overlord of golden Laṅkā spoke with tenderness, "You,
dear lad, the crown upon our clan of Rākṣasas, are the
hope of hosts of Rākṣasas. My heart wants not to send you
once again into this black war. But alas, Fate has turned
against me. Who ever heard, my son, of stones that float on
water; and who has heard of one, though dead, who lives again?"

He answered with a hero's boldness, that foe of the foe
of Asuras, "What a lowly fellow that human is—
and you, an Indra among kings, fear him? Were you to go
to war while yet this servant lives, then, Father, that disgrace
would be decried through all the world. Meghavāhana would
laugh. God Agni would flare up with anger. Twice I vanquished
Rāghava. Command me once more, Father, so that we might
see by what medicines that warrior will revive this time!"

The king of Rākṣasas replied, "Hero Kumbhakarṇa
was my brother—from trepidation, I, prematurely,
woke him. Alas, look there, this body lies slumped upon the
ocean's shore, like a mountain peak or tree that has been struck
by lightning! Yet if you resolutely wish to fight, dear
son, first propitiate your chosen deity—perform
your ritual sacrifice at Nikumbhilā, my gem of
warriors! For it is you I designate commander. But
mark, the lord of day now descends the setting-hill. In the
morning, dearest child, you will wage war with that Rāghava."

Saying this, the king, sprinkling Ganges water, formally
invested with authority his crown prince. Suddenly
a bard broke into songs of praise, playing passionately
upon the vīnā, "O city of the Rākṣasas, there
are teardrops in your eyes. You, whose hair is loose and flowing,
are distraught by sorrow. Your bejeweled crown and regal
ornaments, alas, O royal beauty, lie fallen on
the ground! Arise, my sweet, cast off this gloom, chaste one. The sun
for Rākṣasas is upon the rising-hill. Your night of
woe is over; your dawn has come at last! Arise, my queen,
and look. His strong left hand holds fast the bow whose strumming would
cause Ākhaṇḍala, home in Vaijayanta, to turn pale!

Gaze upon that quiver. Packed therein are Paśupati-
frightening missiles, like the very Pāśupata! Behold
that Meghanāda, most skilled among the skilled, a lion
among Indras among warriors, whose form is pleasing to
the sweeter sex! Praise be to consort Mandodari! Hail,

Naikaśeṣya, ruler of the Rāķṣasas! Hail, Laṅkā

hero-bearer! Dearest Echoes, daughters of the sky, all

listen, then repeat, in full-throated voices: 'Foe-quelling

Indrajit now arms!' Let them quake with terror in their camp—

the Raghu king; Vibhīṣaṇa, disgrace of Rāķṣasas;

and all those vile creatures who roamed the woods of Daṇḍaka."

The Rāķṣasas' drums and such resounded, and Rāķṣasas

exulted. Golden Laṅkā filled with shouts of victory.

Thus ends canto number one,

called "investiture,"

in the poem

_The Slaying of Meghanāda._