As an Indra among monarchs, his royal tasks complete, 
removes his crown, gently sets it down, and then disappears 
into his chamber, so too the lord of day had doffed his 
crown jewel, the darkness-dispelling sun, on that summit 
of the setting-hill. Night accompanied by her stars arrived 
as did that soothing fount of nectar, Night's beloved moon. 

Many a hundred bonfires blazed around the battlefield. 

There, where charioteer Saumitri lay upon the ground, 
Vaidehī's husband fell speechless. His tears flowed uncontrolled, 
mingling with his brother's blood, and wet the earth like a spring 
which trickles down a mountainside, dissolving ocher dust, 
then seeps out on the ground below. The Raghu troops seemed stunned 
by grief—Vibhiṣaṇa, wild in war, and Kumuda, and 
Aṅgada, Hanumān, heroes Nala and Nila, and 
Śrabha, Sumāli, Subāhu, a lion among 
warriors, and Sugrīva—all consoled their lordship's sorrow. 

Once their lord regained consciousness, he, grief-stricken, chided—

"When I renounced the kingdom and went to live in exile 
in the forest, Lakṣmaṇa, as night set in, O expert 
archer, bow in hand, you, at the door of our hut would stand 
alert to guard me. Yet here today in the Rākṣasas' 
enclave—this day, this very city of the Rākṣasas!—
I, among foes, here founder in these perilous waters.
Still then, O great-armed one, you forsake me seeking respite upon the ground? Who will rescue me today, please tell me? Stand up, brave one! Since when do you not heed your brother's words? But if by some ill luck of mine—I who am unlucky always—if you have indeed abandoned me, then tell me honestly, you who are to me much more than life, for I must hear. What misdeed is hapless Jānakī at fault for, in your opinion? Day and night she weeps as she, confined by Rākṣasa, thinks of Lakṣmaṇa, her husband's brother. How did you forget—Brother, how could you ever forget this day the one who like a mother always cared for you so warmly. O pinnacle of Raghu's clan, she, a clan wife, shall she remain incarcerated by Paulastya? Is it right that you should rest before you first destroy in combat such a wicked thief—you who are invincible in battle, bold as omnivorous fire? Arise, my fierce-armed one, victory pennant of the Raghu clan! Minus you I am helpless, a charioteer whose chariot is missing wheels. With you supine on this bed, O hero, Hanumān is powerless, a bow without its bowstring. Aṅgada wails pitifully; friend Sugrīva, noble-minded, is heartsick; good charioteer Vībhīṣana, Karbūra supreme, he too mourns; a host of heroes grieve.
Get up, console these eyes, my brother, by the gaze of yours.

"If, however, you have tired of this awful war, then,

O archer, let us go back to our forest home. Sītā's

rescue, fondest one, is not to be—that luckless woman.

It is not for us to vanquish Rākṣasas. But if you

do not accompany me, how shall I, Lakṣmaṇa, show

my face upon the Sarayū's far shore where Sumitrā,

your mother who so loves her son, laments? What shall I say

when she asks me, 'Where, O Rāma, is the object

of my love, your little brother?' How shall I answer to

your wife, Urmiḷā, and to the people of the city?

Stand up, dear child. Why do you turn a deaf ear today toward

this plea your brother makes, for love of whom you quit the realm

with its amenities and took to the forest? Out of

sympathy, you always used to cry whenever you would

see these eyes of mine moist with tears. Tenderly you dabbed those

teary rivulets. Now I am drenched with water from my

eyes, yet you, who are to me much more than life, will you not

so much as glance my way? Lakṣmaṇa, does such behavior

ever suit you, Brother (you who are renowned throughout the

world as one devoted to his brother!), you who are my

everlasting joy. All my life I held firm to dharma

and worshipped the gods—and is it this the gods have given
in return? O Night, compassion-filled, you who nightly make
the flowers, withered by the summer's heart, succulent with
drops of dew, revive this blossom. You who are a fount of
nectar, god of nectar rays, pour down your life-bestowing
juices, save Lakṣmana—save beggar Rāghava, kind one."

The foe of Rākṣasas, forlorn, wailed upon the field of
battle cradling his dearest younger brother. All about
the warrior throng howled with sadness, just as howls a stand of
stately trees at midnight when winds blow deep in the forest.

At her home upon Kailāsa, the mountain's daughter\(^1\) was

empathizing with the saddened Raghu lad. From the lap
of Dhūrjaṭi to his lotus feet the droplets of her
tears trickled, like dew upon the hundred-petalled lotus
at dawn. Her lordship queried, "For what reason, my pretty,
are you distressed today, tell me?" "What is there which you do
not already know, my god?" replied the goddess Gaurī,

"Out of grief for Lakṣmana, Rāmacandra mourns wildly
in golden Laṅkā. Listen! My heart is stirred by Rāma's
sorrow. Who in the world, O lord of the universe, will
ever worship this slave of yours again? You embarrassed
me greatly today, lord. You have plunged my reputation
into waters of disrepute. This servant of yours falls
at your feet, at fault for disturbing your meditation,
O Indra of austerities—just for that, I guess, you
punish me so? Ill-fated was the moment Indra came
to me! ill-fated, when Maithili's spouse did my pūjā!"

The great goddess sobbed silently, her feelings hurt. Smiling,
Śambhu answered, "Why so glum, daughter of the Indra of
mountains, over this mere trifling matter? Send that warrior,
Indra among Rāghavas, to Kṛtānta's city with

Māyā; by my favor, charioteer Dāśarathi,
in corporeal form, shall gain access to spirit world.
His father, king Daśaratha, will inform him by what
means the brother might regain his life. Stay your gloom my
moon-faced one. Present to Māyā, prettiest, my trident.
There in Yama's land of darkness it will shine a fiery
pillar and illuminate that realm. The spirits there will
honor it, as loyal subjects do the regal scepter."

At her Mount Kailāsa home, Durgā called to mind Māyā.
At once that sorceress appeared and, with hands together,
bowed before Ambikā. In soft tones Pārvatī spoke, "Go
to Lāṅkā, beguiler of the universe. Maithili's
mate laments, beside himself from grief for Saumitri. Speak
to him with sweet words and guide him to the land of spirits.
His father, Daśaratha, will advise him by what means
high-minded Saumitri might gain again his life, along
with all the soldiers slain in this destructive war. Hold this trident of Trisūli's in your lotus hand, chaste lady. This best of weapons, like a pillar made of fire, will glow, illuminating Yama's land of darkness." With a bow to Umā, Māyā set off. The shadows in the Milky Way drifted far away, as though outshone by the brilliance of her beauty. Those myriad stars smiled—like gems inlaid on a ray of sun. In her wake she left across the face of the sky a trace of light as that beauty, like a ship in ocean waters, headed for Laṅkā. Soon that goddess landed where the sullen jewel of Raghu's clan stood among his army. Golden Laṅkā filled with heavenly fragrance.

At Rāghava's ear, Mother whispered, "Wipe away your streams of tears, charioteer Dāśarathi, your beloved brother shall revive. Bathe in the sea's sacred waters, then come with me at once to Yama's quarters. Nobel one, you will enter bodily the land of spirits by virtue of Śiva's favor. Your father Daśaratha will make known how well-marked Lakṣmanā will again live. O fierce-armed one, come now. I shall excavate a tunnel. Fearlessly, fine charioteer, proceed through it. I shall go ahead of you to show the way. Tell everyone, Sugrīva and all commanders, that they should stand guard over Lakṣmanā."
Astounded, Rāghavendra alerted all his generals
to take heed. Then that noble one set out for the seashore
—to that place of holy pilgrimage. Once he had bathed his
body in these sacred currents, the most fortunate one
propitiated all the gods, his ancestors and such,
giving offerings of drinking water, then with dispatch
proceeded to the entrance of his tent, alone. Now the
jewel of men saw his quarters bright by godly power.
Hands cupped in supplication, that charioteer performed
worship with flowers meant especially for the goddess.
Adorning his imposing figure in fine warrior garb,
that lord of warriors bravely ventured into the tunnel
—for what does he with whom the gods find favor have to fear?

On went that best of Rāghavas, as goes a traveler
down a path through a darkened forest when at night the beams
the nectar-rayed moon, smiling, casts penetrate the woodland.
And on ahead proceeded goddess Māyā in silence.

In a while that best of Raghus, startled, heard waves crashing,
as though a thousand oceans swelled, bellowing angrily.
He gazed with trepidation not far away upon a
monstrous city, ever cloaked in night. The Vaitaraṇi,
like a moat, flowed by resounding thunderously! In fits and
spurts waves bubbled hotly, just as milk in heated vessels
surges upward, bursting into puffs of vapor, panicked by the fire's power. The gem of day does not show itself in splendor in that sky, nor does the moon, nor stars. Thick clouds, packing wind and spewing forth great balls of fire, roam throughout deserted pathways, howling wildly, like Pīṅkī at Pralaya when, inflamed, he sets his arrows to his bow!

Taken aback, the Raghu lord gazed upon a wondrous bridge that spanned the river—sometimes fiery, sometimes wrapped in dense smoke, beautiful sometimes, as though it were built of gold.

Beings by the millions were ever running toward that bridge—some wailing, agonized, while others acted jubilant.

Vaidehi's husband asked, "Tell me, kind woman, why the bridge repeatedly assumes a different guise? And why do those countless beings (like moths who spot a flame) dash to the bridge?"

The goddess Māyā answered, "It is a bridge of many natures and can at will change its form, O Sītā's husband. To sinners it is veiled in smoke from its fiery power; when virtuous beings come along, it turns most pleasant and beautiful, like a golden path to heaven. Over there, those countless souls you see, gem of men, left their bodies in the mortal world; all are on their journey to the land of spirits to enjoy, or suffer, as it were, the fruits of deeds on earth. They who followed dharma's ways cross the bridge..."
to the northern, western, and eastern gates. Sinners, in great misery, forever swim the river. Yama's henchmen harass them upon the sandy shore, while in the water, their sin-filled hearts burn as if in scalding oil. Come along with me. You soon shall see what men's eyes have not seen before."

With deliberate steps the best of Raghus walked behind; ahead, like a golden lamp, the sorceress illumined that horrific land. Beside the bridge, Rāma, seized with fear, spied a monstrous figure, a messenger of Yama, with punishing rod in hand. Thundering, that emissary of Kṛṣṇa interrogated, "Who are you? By what power, O brash one, did you come into this land, alive and with your body whole? Speak at once, or I shall crush you here and now by a blow from this staff!" Goddess Māyā smiled, and to that messenger Mother vaunted Śiva's trident.

Head bowed, that henchman spoke to the chaste lady, "Can it be within my power, faithful one, to halt your progress? See, the bridge turns gold with joy, as does the sky when greeting Dawn."

They both crossed the Vaitaraṇī river. On ahead that Raghu sovereign saw a city's iron gates—wheel-shaped rings of flames spun constantly, spewing sparks everywhere. On the face of that imposing gate, the jewel of men saw written there in fiery letters, "By this path sinners go
to suffer constant sorrow in the realm of sorrows—you
who enter, give up all hope as you step inside this land!"

Before the gates that charioteer caught sight of Fever,
gaunt and frail. Now his skinny body quaked with cold, now burned
in horrid heat, like the waters' sovereign, from the forces
of Vaḍabā's fire. Bile and phlegm and gas—they all attacked
him, causing loss of consciousness. Beside this malady
sat Gluttony, gross of belly, regurgitating half-
digested food, foul thing, scooping up more tasty morsels
with both hands, wolfing them down. Near him Inebriation
grinned, his eyelids heavy from a drunken stupor—sometimes
dancing, sometimes singing, sometimes quarreling, crying sometimes,
but always the senseless fool, always a destroyer of
one's senses. Next to him was nasty Prurience, body
putrid as a corpse, yet that sinner lusted after sex
—his heart ever sizzled in the flames of carnal craving.
There beside him sat Consumption spitting blood and hacking,
coughing night and day. Asthma wheezed and gasped, in gripping pain.
Cholera, his eyes lackluster, waves of blood from mouth and
anus spewed like streams of purest water—in the form of
thirst, this foe attacks repeatedly. There stood that frightful
messenger of Yama, spasmodic Tetanus by name,
who grips one's weakened body cruelly, like a tiger, who,
whenpreying on some forest creature, stalks now, then pounces
on its quarry, clawing it exuberantly. Nearby,
beside that sickness, sat Insanity—violent at
times, inflamed like fire when offered an oblation of ghee,
at other times completely catatonic—now decked out
in odd apparel, then again, stark naked, like Kāli,
Hara's darling, on the field of battle—sometimes frenzied,
singing songs and clapping gaily—sometimes sobbing—sometimes
with a broad grin on her twisted lips—at still other times
slitting her own throat with a sharp knife, swallowing poison,
drowning in a well, hanging by the neck—sometimes, for shame!
strutting coyly, lewdly, a most lascivious woman
seducing lustful men—and without discriminating
between feces, food, and urine, she, alas, would sometimes
mix them all together and eat heartily—at times she
is bound in chains, other times she seems composed, just like a
river without current, in the absence of any breeze!
Who can describe all the other maladies that were there?
Rāghava eyed a charioteer in battle on a
fire-colored chariot (his clothes drenched in blood, a sharp-edged
sword in his hand). At the chariot's prow stood Wrath, attired
in driver's garb. A necklace made of human heads around
his throat, a pile of corpses heaped before him. He noticed
Murder, fearsome falchion in hand. His arms upraised, alas,
always in the act of slaying. And from a tree limb, rope
around his neck, swung Suicide noiselessly, tongue lolling,
fright-filled eyes wide open. Speaking sweetly to the Indra
among Rāghavas, goddess Māyā said, "All these ghastly
messengers of Śamana you see in sundry guises,

Raghu hero, they roam the surface of the earth without

rest, just as a hunter through dense forests stalks his deer. Step

into Kṛtānta's city, spouse of Sītā. Today I

shall show you under what conditions souls reside within

desolate this land of souls. Here we have the southern gate; eighty-four

hell-pits lie within this sector. Now come along at once."

The courageous spouse of Sītā stepped into Kṛtānta's
city, ah me, just like springtime, king of seasons, into

a charred forest, or like elixir into a lifeless

body. Darkness filled the city, while all around arose

wails of agony; both the land and waters shook nonstop

from quakes; a massive line of roiling clouds in angry fits

spit deadly fire; fetid winds wafted, as though a thousand
corpse were then being cremated at a burning ground.

After a while, that best of Raghus saw in front of him

a huge lake—deadly fire rolled like water in crashing waves.

In it swam a million beings, twisting, writhing, screaming
with agony! "Alas, heartless Fortune, did you create
us in these many forms for this? Ah, intolerable!
Why did we not succumb to searing gastric juices in
our mothers' womb? Where are you, gem of day? And you, O lord
of night, moon with the nectar-rays? Will our eyes again be
soothed by gazing on you two again, O gods? Where are our
sons, our wives, our relatives? Where, ah, are those possessions
for which we labored constantly by many schemes—for which
we did our shady deeds, while indifferent to dharma?"

In this manner, the sinful souls lamented time and time
again wallowing within that lake. From the void came the
answer, booming savagely, a message born of that void,
"Why, O hapless ones, do you cavil in vain at your fate?
Here you suffer all the consequences of your actions.
For what reason did you hoodwink dharma with such evil
actions? The rule of Fate is known as fair throughout the world."

When the heavenly message ceased, Yama's monstrous henchmen
bashed in heads with staves. Worms gnawed away. Diamond-taloned flesh-
consuming raptors swooped down upon those wispy figures,
ripping out intestines, screeching hideously. And the
lands around were ringing with the screams of tortured sinners.

Sadly, Māyā spoke to Rāghava, "This fiery lake is
known as Raurava, listen, gem of Raghus. Base-minded
ones who steal another's riches remain here forever.

If those who judge are partial to injustice, they too end
up in this lake, as do all other beings guilty of
such flagrant sins. Here the fires never are extinguished, the
worms never cease gnawing. I tell you, this is no common
conflagration which consumes these spirits in this loathsome
hell, best of Raghus. Fate's rage, assuming fire's form, burns here
perpetually. Come along, charioteer, I shall
show you Kumbhipāka, the hell in which Yama's henchmen
fry sinners in hot oil. Listen, O hero, not far off
that is their sound of crying. By my māyā power I
have blocked your nostrils, otherwise you could not stand it here,
O charioteer, best of Raghus. But let us go to
where in dark pits those who have committed suicide moan
pitiably, ever captive." With hands cupped together,
that sovereign among men spoke, "Please forgive this slave of yours,
Kṣemaṅkari. I shall perish here and now from others'
sorrows, if I see more suffering of this sort. Mother,
who could willingly be born into this world knowing these
are the consequences? Man is helpless—can he, Mother,
ward off the sorcery of sin?" Answered Māyā, "There is
not a venom in this world, O great archer, for which there
is no antidote. But if one shuns that medicine, then
who can save him? The noble one who fights sin through his deeds
is always looked upon with sympathy by gods—Dharma
shields that one in armor quite impregnable. Were you to
witness all these pits of punishment, O charioteer—
but enough of this, let us now proceed along this path."

On a ways, the spouse of Sītā stepped into a forest
—silent, boundless, tall; no birds called; no breezes blew within
that frightful woods; flowers—they which beautify a forest—
would not bloom. Here, there sunlight trickled through dense foliage,
but it was without strength, like the smile an invalid makes.

Beings by the thousands congregated suddenly round
that Raghu lord, eager, just like flies around a vat of
honey. Someone queried in a most pathetic voice, "Who
are you, O embodied one? Speak, by what virtue have you
ventured to this land? Are you god or mortal man, tell us
now. Speak, gratify us all, O fount of virtue, with your
nectar-laden rain of speech. Since that day Yama's henchmen
wrenched away our wretched lives, we have been without sounds made
of human tongue. Our eyes are content now that they have seen
your form, fine-limbed hero. Please satisfy these ears with speech."

The foe of Rākṣasas replied, "This slave of yours was born
among the Raghu clan, O spirits. The charioteer
Daśaratha is my father. His chief queen Kauśalyā,
is my mother. They call this servant of yours by the name
of Rāma. Alas, I dwell through ill luck in the forest.
By Trisūli's orders, I am to meet my father. That
is why, my friends, I came today to Kṛtānta's city."

Retorted one among the spirits, "I know you, Indra
among champions. By your arrows I lost my body in
the Pañcavaṭi forest." With a start, the gem of men
gazed at Rākṣasa Mārica—now incorporeal.

Rāmacandra asked, "For what sin have you come here to this
hellish forest, Rākṣasa, tell me that?" "The cause of this
harsh punishment, alas, is mean Paulastya, Raghu king!"
answered he, devoid of form. "It was to do his bidding
that I deceived you, and consequently am condemned to
this hell." Then along with Dūśaṇa came Khara (Khara,
or the sharp one, sharp as the keenest sword in battle, when
he was alive), who, angered when they saw the Raghu lord,
pride wounded, both slipped away, just as a viper, lacking
poison-fangs, humbled, hides when it spots a mongoose. All of
a sudden the forest filled with a colossal roar. Those
ghosts dashed off. Dry leaves were flung about, as when a cyclone
blows. Māya told the monarch among champions, "Hear me, gem
of Raghus, these spirits live in diverse pits. At times they
come and wander through this forest of lament, lamenting
silently. See there, Yama's messengers mercilessly

drive them all away, each to his proper place." The one who

is the sun to Vaidehi's lotus heart saw herds of ghosts

with Yama's minions' horrifying shadows in pursuit.

Those ghosts ran swiftly panting, just as a deer herd fleet of foot

bounds off breathless, pursued by a hungry lion. Eyes moist,

Rāmacandra, sea of kindness, went sadly with Māyā.

A moment later that finest warrior shuddered as he

heard agonized screaming. He saw off in the distance some

thousand women, pallid, like the moon in daytime skies. One

of them tore at her long hair saying, "I always used to

bind you up prettily, to bind the hearts of randy men folk,

unheedful of my deeds and dharma, driven mad by youth's

intoxicating wine." Another scratched her breasts with her

own fingernails and said, "Alas, I spent my days for naught

adorning you in pearls and diamonds. And, in the end, what

came of that!" Yet another woman, from remorse, gouged out

her eyes (as cruel vultures do the eyes of carrion)

saying, "I used to outline you with kohl, wicked organs,

then smile and fling my arrows with your sidelong glances. In

mirrors I would gaze upon your brightness and feel contempt

for doe eyes. Is this, finally, the spoils of vanity?"

That throng of women departed, whimpering. Behind them
marched a matron of Kṛtānta, gruesome serpents hissing
through her tresses; her nails resembled sabers; her lips were
smeared with blood; her two banana-breasts hung down below her
navel, ever swinging to and fro; and flames leapt from her
two nostrils, then blended, augmenting the fire of her eyes.

Addressing Rāghava, Māyā spoke, "All such women as
you see before you, gem of Raghus, were much enamored
of clothes and fineries while on the surface of the earth.

These wanton women, driven by libido, would always
dress like the forest floor in springtime so as to lure the
hearts of desirous men to play at love. Now where is that
fetching beauty, prize of youth, alas?" Impulsively, an
echo echoed, "Now where is that fetching beauty, prize of
youth, alas!" Weeping, those women left, each for her own hell.

Again Māyā spoke, "Gaze once more before you, O foe of
Rākṣasas." That gem of men then saw another group of
women, infatuating with their beauty, their chignons
laced with fragrant blossoms, the might of Kāma's fire in their
doe-like eyes, the sweetest of ambrosial juices upon
their lips! Their necks, replete with jewels, were like the conch shell
of the king of gods; a filmy bodice made from gold threads
clothed the pulchritude that was their breasts with a mere pretext
of clothing, to show them off the more, intensifying
sensual cravings in hearts of lustful men. Their midribs
were quite svelte. From within blue silk (most sheer) their rounded thighs,
in contempt, it seemed, for any covering at all, showed
teasingly their banana-tree-shaped splendor, as did those
Apsarās' exquisite naked bodies while cavorting
in the waters of Lake Mānasa. Ankle-bells rang from
their feet, an ornamental girdle round their hips. Vinā,
rabāb strings, and tiny cymbals, each merrily in its
own style, blended sweetly with mrdaṅga drums' gay beat. Those
shapely women undulated on those waves of music.

From elsewhere there appeared a gathering of handsome men,
laughing softly, good-looking like the warrior-god, hero
Kārttikeya, the favorite of the Kṛttikās, or,
O Rati, like your Manmatha, he for whom your heart craves.

On noticing that group of men, the womenfolk, in a
tizzy from lust's juices, flung their arrows of flirtatious
sidelong looks—bangles jingled musically round their wrists.
On their hot breath rose the pollen from the flowers in their
garlands and, like dust, soon blurred good judgment's sun. The men had
lost the battle, but is there strength in men to win such wars?

Just as the bird and his mate lose themselves in games of love
while frolicking, these suave sophisticates caught hold of those
cozettes, sauntered to the woods—for what purpose, eye told eye!
Suddenly the forest filled with shrieks! Astounded, Rāma

saw those men and women wrestling with each other, rolling

on the ground, biting, scratching, pummeling with clenched fists and

kicking. They tore their hair, gouged eyes, clawed at nose and mouth with

adamantine fingernails. Earth was soaked by streams of blood.

Both the parties struggled fiercely, just as Bhāma, dressed in

women's clothing, fought with Kīcaka in Virāṭa. There

came all of Yama's henchmen, quickly driving the two sides

apart, beating them with iron lāthīs. In gentle tones,

pretty Māyā spoke to Rāghava, joy of Raghu's clan,

"Listen, my child, these men in life were slaves to Kāma; those

seductive women served Kāma as his handmaids. They both

indulged their carnal appetites unbridled, ah alas,

drowning dharma in the waters of non-dharma, shedding

shame—now punishment is meted out in Yama's city.

Just as a mirage deceives the thirsty person on a
desert and just as the golden grace of mākāla fruit
defrauds the famished, such is the case with copulation.

The cravings of both partners are never satisfied in

full. What more need I say, my child, look for yourself. Such pain,

O lucky one, many sinners suffer in the mortal

world, before they come to hell. This is Fate's decree: He who

spends his youth immorally becomes debilitated
later on in life. Undampable are the flames of sex,
which will consume one's heart; unquenchable is the rage of
Fate that, like lust's fire, burns one's body, mighty-armed one, I
tell you. In the end, this is the lot of just such sinners."

Bowing low before the feet of Māyā, the gem of men
said, "All these strange things I have witnessed in this land, by your
grace, O Mother, who could possibly describe them all? But
where is the kingly sage? I shall beg at his feet for young
Lakṣmaṇa. Lead me to his dwelling place—this is my wish."

Smiling, Māyā replied, "This city is huge, Rāghava,
I have shown you but a tiny portion. Were we two to
wander, champion, endlessly for twelve years through Kṛtānta's
realm, even then we would not see all the sections. Beyond
the eastern gate reside, with husbands, faithful wives who were
devoted to their mates; that portion of this city is
unparalleled in heaven or on earth; magnificent
mansions stand in pleasant floral groves; most delightful ponds
always brim with lovely lotuses; spring breezes humming
sweetly flow forever; many of the finest cuckoos
sing constantly their special pā note. Spontaneously
vīnās sound, as do muraja drums, small cymbals, flutes, and
seven honeyed tones from saptasvarās. Yogurt, milk, and
ghee gush from springs continuously, all about; mangoes,
the ambrosial fruit, ripen in the orchards; Annadā 

herself serves exquisite foods. Delicious fare of every 

sort (what one chews, sucks, licks, or drinks) one has for the asking, 

as in heaven from the ever fruitful wish-fulfilling 

twine, great archer. We do not have business there. Go, hero, 

through the northern gate and amble for a while in that fine 

place. Soon you shall see your father's feet, jewel among men."

Heading north, the two of them proceeded hurriedly. The 

spouse of Sitā saw some hundred mountains bald and scorched, ah, 

as though from flames of godly fury! Some held heaps of snow 

on the summits of their highest peaks; others of them roared 

repeatedly, disgorging fire, melting boulders in their 

fiery streams, blanketing the sky with ashes, filling the 

surrounding countryside with rumblings. His lordship saw a 

hundred endless deserts; hot winds blew ceaselessly, driving 

on ahead dunes of sand, like waves. That warrior observed a 

vast expanse of water, sea-like, its far shore unseen. In 

one spot raged a storm, whipping up whitecaps tall as mountains. 

In another, still waters stood, growing stagnant. Monstrous 

frogs cavorted there, croaking gravely, and a tangle of 

gigantic snakes, bodies endless like that of Śeṣa! In 

yet another place halāhala poison simmered, just 

as in the ocean at the time of churning it. Sinners
piteously roamed this land, whining. Snakes struck, scorpions stung, and there were insects with huge pincers. Flames beneath the earth's surface, bitter cold in the air! Alas, who ever finds a moment's rest before this northern gate! With quickened pace, that finest charioteer moved along with Māyā.

When the shore draws near, once the helmsman with great effort has traversed a lonely stretch of water, and the wind, bosom friend of fragrance borne from flower gardens, rushes out to greet him, and his ears are soothed to hear the cuckoo's call, mixed with human voices, after many days away—then that boatman is afloat upon a sea of ecstasy. With like feelings did the best of Raghus hear some music not far off. That noble one, dumbfounded, saw golden mansions all around, lush gardens filled with golden blossoms, deep ponds, repositories for the fresh blue lotuses. In a pleasant voice Māyā said, "It is through this gate, O warrior, all great charioteers who fall in face-to-face battle go to savor everlasting happiness. Limitless, O noble one, is the sense of joy in this locale. Come along by this garden path, my firm-armed one, for I shall show to you the celebrated, by whose fame the city of Sañjīvanī is scented, like a fragrance through a garden. In the land of virtue, Fortune's smile shines like the
moon, sun, and stars, brilliantly, day after day." Intrigued, that
warrior walked on briskly. Ahead went Māyā, trident in
hand. In due course, that hero noticed a field before him—
like a battle ground. In one place, spears stood stately like some
śāla forest. Elsewhere an array of horses whinnied,
fitted in their martial trappings. Yet elsewhere trumpeted
an Indra among elephants. Shield-wielding soldiers gamed,
gripping sword and shield. Some place else some wrestlers grappled on
the turf. Banners fluttered, as if exhilarated by
the battle. In yet another region on his flowered
seat, a golden viñā in his hand, enchanting to his
audience, sat the poet singing songs in praise of the
Kṣatriya clan. Inspired by that music, warriors cheered.
Heaps of pārijāta blooms were rained down, I do not know
by whom, filling the environs with sweet scents. Apsarās
cavorted, and Kinnaras vocalized, as in heaven.

Māyā spoke to Rāghava, "All charioteers slain in
face-to-face combat in the Satya yuga you see on
this field today, crest-jewel of Kṣatriyas. Look there,
Niśumbha, body gold-hued like Mount Hemakūṭa; the
glow from his diadem ascends the skies, a valorous
charioteer—Caṇḍī, born of gods' joined powers, vanquished
in pitched battle that monarch among champions. Look, Śumbha,
stately as the trident-holder Śambhu. And over there,

mighty Mahiṣāsura, breaker of horses. And there,

the champion and fine warrior Tripura, Tripurāri's

foe. And Vṛtra and other Daityas, renowned throughout the

world. See there Sunda and Upasunda, once more floating

calmly on the waters of fraternal love." The noble

Rāghava inquired, "Tell me, kind one, why do I not

see Kumbhakarna, Atikāya, Nārāntaka (he

who means the death to mortal men in warfare), as well as

Indrajit, and all other Rākṣasa charioteers?"

Replied the sorceress, "Before one's funeral is performed,

one does not gain access to this city, O husband of

Vaidehī. On the city's fringes such beings wander

unless and until their obsequies are carried out by

friends—I relate to you what Fate decrees. Take note, O best

of charioteers, a fine warrior heads our way. I shall

stand beside you, O jewel among men, invisible.

Enjoy a pleasant talk." So saying, Mother disappeared.

Startled, the best of Raghūs gazed upon that sterling lord

of warriors. Lightning danced atop his diadem. From that

prodigious figure, his raiment shone quite dazzling to the

eye. Lance in hand, he strode the stride of a bull elephant.

Coming closer, that lord of champions, addressing Rāma,
questioned, "For what purpose do you travel here today in your physical form, crown-jewel of the Raghu clan? It was in unfair combat that you slew me, to gratify Sugriva. But put aside your fears. We know no malice in Kṛśanta's city, for here everyone has subdued his passions. The stream of human life, which flows so murky on the surface of the earth, courses limpid through this land. I am Vāli." Much chagrined, the gem of men recognized that monarch of Kiṣkindhā, an Indra among warriors. Vāli added, smiling, "Come along with me, O warrior Dāśarathī. See that garden not far off, my lord, full of golden flowers; charioteer Jaṭāyu strolls through that arbor all the time, in your father's company. That hero will be overjoyed to see you. The noble one gave his life, acting in accord with dharma, in order that he rescue a chaste woman then in danger. For that reason is his honor boundless. Now come along quickly."

The foe of Rākṣasas queried, "Tell me kindly, O good charioteer, are all equally content within this realm?" "In the deep recesses of a mine," Vāli answered, "a thousand precious stones are formed, O Rāghava. All are not of equal radiance, mind you; but is there any, tell me, jewel among Raghus, totally devoid of
luster?" In this way the two of them conversed at leisure.

600 Through that pleasant grove where babbled constantly a stream of nectar waters, the gem of men saw Jaṭāyu, son of Garuḍa, a god-like charioteer, ensconced upon a platform fashioned out of ivory and inlaid with a profusion of gems! Notes from the viṇā were heard all about. A glow the tint of lotus petals made those woods radiant, as does sunshine filtered through temporary awnings at the house wherein there is a celebration. Fragrant vernal breezes wafted there. Affectionately that warrior spoke to Rāghava, "My eyes are soothed today to see you, jewel of the human family, offspring of my friend! Praise be to you! Auspicious one, your mother had conceived you at a most auspicious moment! Praise be to my erstwhile companion, Daśaratha, he who gave you life! You are favored by the god clan; hence you can come in your own body to this city. Speak, my precious, let me hear the news of battle. Has the wicked Rāvana been felled in combat?" Bowing out of deference, his lordship spoke most sweetly, "By grace of those two feet of yours, revered elder, I slew countless Rākṣasas in heated warfare. Rāvana, sovereign of the Rākṣasas, is now the sole surviving warrior in that city of the Rākṣasas.
It was by that one's arrows that noble Lakṣmaṇa, my younger brother, lost his life. Your slave has come today on Śiva's orders to this land most hard to reach. Please tell this servant where his father, friend of yours, may be found, warrior."

Hero Jaṭāyu spoke, "That kingly sage resides among the other royal sages, through the western gate. It is not prohibited for me to venture to that land. I shall escort you. Come along, O enemy subduer."

That noble one observed fascinating places of all sorts, golden mansions, many god-like charioteers. On banks of lakes, in flower gardens, beings gamboled in great delight, just as in the springtime honeybees buzz about in pleasant wooded groves, or as at night fireflies light up the ten directions. The two proceeded with quickened pace, as thousands of those beings crowded around Rāghava.

Hero Jaṭāyu announced, "This grand charioteer was born among the Raghus. In somatic form, by Śiva's orders, he comes to this city of the spirits to gaze upon his father's feet. Bless him, then be off, all of you, each to his own station, creatures." All wished him well, then left. The two proceeded blissfully. In one direction a golden-bodied mountain peak held its crown of trees up to the skies, like the crown of matted hair upon Kapardī,
mendicant with matted hair. Little streams skipped and gurgled.

Diamonds, other gems, and pearls were visible in crystal
waters. Here and there in valleys, green tracts of earth were decked
with flower blossoms. Lakes had formed, embossed with lotuses.
Constantly the finest cuckoos cooed throughout the woodlands.

The son of Vinata's son, addressing Rāghava, spoke,

"Look, jewel among Raghus, the western gate, all of gold,
the houses in this wondrous land are made with diamonds. Look
there, beneath that golden tree above whose stately head is
spread a canopy of emerald leaves sits Dilipa, gem
of men, upon a throne of gold, beside his faithful wife
Sudakṣiṇā. Worship with devotion the founder of
your lineage. In this land dwell countless royal rishis—
Ikṣvāku, Māndhātā, Nahuṣa, all world-recognized.
Step forward, honor your forefather, O mighty-armed one!"

Advancing, that monarch of charioteers fell prostrate
at the couple's feet. Conferring his blessing, Dilipa
asked, "Who are you? Tell me how you came in bodily form
to this land of spirits, god-like charioteer? When I
gaze upon your moon-like face, my heart is buoyed up, on a
sea of bliss." Sudakṣiṇā then spoke in honeyed tones, "O
fortunate one, tell us at once, who are you? Just as when
in foreign lands the sight of one's own countryman pleases,
just so are my eyes delighted, seeing you. What righteous
time, high-minded lad? If indeed you are born of gods, O
godly one, why bow before us two? If not a god, then,
like a god among mankind, which clan do you glorify?"

Dāśarathi, hands cupped in supplication, answered, "Your
son, named Raghu, kingly sage, renowned the whole world over,
that world-conqueror, by his own might, gained conquest over
the entire world. To him was born a son, named Aja
—protector of the earth; Indumāti married Aja;
from her womb was born high-minded Daśaratha; his chief
queen is Kauśalyā; your thrall was born of her. The sons of
mother Sumitrā, lion Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna,
are vanquishers of foes in battle. Mother Kaikeyī,
your lordship, bore my brother Bharata in her belly."

The regal sage responded, "So you are Rāmacandra,
coronet of the Ikṣvāku clan. I bestow upon
you blessings. May your fame be constantly proclaimed across
the world, for as long as moon and sun rise in the sky, famed
one. My lineage shines upon the surface of the earth
due to all your virtues, O paragon of virtue. That
gold mountain you see there, at its base and famous in this
region stands a banyan tree, its name Imperishable,
atop the Vaitarani river's bank. Beneath that tree
your father worships faithfully king Dharma on behalf
of you. O mighty-armed, ornament of the Raghu clan,
go to him. Warrior Daśaratha grieves for your sorrows."

The gem of men, excited, bowed before those lotus feet,
bade good-bye to warrior Jaṭāyu, and set out on his
own (accompanied by Māyā in the void) to where that
scintillating golden mountain stood, then saw that best of
warriors underneath the tree Imperishable—one the
Vaitarani's riverbank, whose waters run like nectar
through this land—its golden branches, emerald leaves, its fruit,
alas, who can describe the luster of that fruit? that king
of trees, prayed to by the gods, and grantor of salvation.

From afar the kingly sage caught sight of his fine son, stretched
out his arms (chest wet with tears) and said, "Have you, who are to
me much more than life, come at last to this land most hard to
reach, by favor of the gods, to please this pair of eyes? Have
I recovered you today, my long lost treasure? Aha,
how shall I tell you, Rāmabhadra, how I suffered in
your absence? Just as iron melts in fire's power, so did
I, in sorrow over you, and left my mortal body
prematurely. I shut my eyes, alas, my heavy heart
on fire. Harsh Fate, my child, for misdeeds of mine has written
pain and struggle, ah me, on your forehead, you who always
tread the path of dharma! That is why all this happened. That
is why, alas, Kaikeyi, like a female elephant
in heat, trampled under foot the creeper of my hopes, that
which made the garden of my life so beautiful." Warrior
dasaratha wailed while DASarathi wept in silence.

720 That best of Raghus spoke, "O Father, now your servant bobs
upon a shoreless sea. Who can save him in these dire straits?
If what transpires on the earth is known within this city,
then it is surely not unknown to those fair feet of yours
the reasons why your slave has ventured to this region. Well
before his time, alas, my dearest younger brother died
today in cruelest battle! If I cannot have him back,
I shall not return to where the gem of day and moon and
stars shine gloriously! Order me and I shall die right
before you, Father! I cannot live in separation
from him!" cried the gem of men at his father's feet. Moved by
his child's sorrow, Dasaratha said, "I do know for what
reason you have traveled to this city, son. Earnestly
I worship sovereign Dharma, gladly making offerings
of water with my cupped hands, all for your well-being. You
shall have your Laksmana, you who bear auspicious markings.
His life is yet confined in his body, like a captive
held inside a crumbling prison. On the peak of fair Mount Gandhamādana grows the greatest curative, my dear, Viśālaṃkarāṇi, a golden creeper. Fetch it and revive your younger brother. King Yama himself freely told of such a remedy today. Devoted servant, Hanumān, son of the swift, he who moves with speed, send him. In an instant he, that awesome hero, the equal of Prabhāṣjana, will bring the medicine. In due time you will vanquish Rāvaṇa in a fierce battle. By your darts that wicked one will perish, and with him his entire lineage. My daughter-in-law, Lakṣmī of the Raghu clan, that little mother, will return and once again will brighten up the Raghu household—yet it is not your luck, dear child, to savor happiness. For just as myrrh, alas, enduring suffering, smolders in its censer as it scents with sweet aroma the surroundings, so too famed one, will the homeland of the Bhāratas be filled with your sweet fame. It is due to sins of mine that Fate has punished you—I perished for my own sins, in separation from you.

"Only half the night has now elapsed on earth. Return at once by godly might to Laṅkā, hero. Dispatch forthwith warrior Hanumān. Fetch the cure while yet it is still dark."

Daśāratha blessed the champion Daśārathi. In hopes
of taking dust from his father's feet, the son had offered lotus hands to those lotus-like extremities—but in vain, for he failed to touch those feet! In a reassuring voice, Aja's son, born of Raghu, said to Daśaratha's son, "This is not my former body that you see here, you who are much more than life to me. It is but a shadow. How can you, corporeal one, touch this shadow? Like an image in a mirror, or in water, is my body. Now without delay, my dearest one, return to Laṅkā."

Bowing, speechless, toward those feet, that noble one departed, accompanied by Māyā. Shortly that hero reached the spot where good warrior Lakṣmaṇa lay still upon the ground. That throng of warriors stood about, sleepless in their sorrow.

Thus ends canto number eight, called "city of the spirits," in the poem

*The Slaying of Meghanāda*