

THE SIEGE

When Rama heard from Angada what had happened at Lanka and learnt from him the attitude and alertness of the enemy, he called together the chief leaders and commissioned them to decide how best to lay siege to the four gates of the City. At this, the Ruler of the Monkeys (Sugriva), the Ruler of the Bears (Jambavan) and the Ruler of the Rakshasas (Vibhishana) met together. They decided on the division of their forces into four, under commanders and guides. Then they fell at the feet of Rama and enthused by his blessings, they gave orders for attack.

With Rama in their hearts, the Vanaras armed with boulders and trees rolled forward in terror-striking floods. Lanka was reputed impregnable, but the blessings of Rama helped them to break into it. The Eastern Gate was stormed by the forces under Nala. The Southern Gate was breached

by the millions under the command of Angada. The Western Gate fell before the onslaught of the army led by Hanuman. The Northern Gate was guarded by Ravana himself, and Rama fought with him there. The Vanaras had no war drums or trumpets, but the “Ram—Ram” they voiced forth in devotion rose as one Call from all throats and echoed from the sky. The entire City of Lanka was sunk in confusion and panic. Ravana was blinded by foolish pride. He was exulting at the prospect of victory over the opposing forces, and revelling in the thought that the festive day of victory had dawned for the Rakshasa Sun.

The Rakshasas had taken up positions over walls and turrets and bastions of the fort, just as clouds on the peaks of the Meru Mountain. They were beating drums and blowing trumpets. Their shouts of “Victory for Ravana” confronted the confident shout “Victory for Rama, the Lord.” The boulders that the Rakshasas were hurling on the Vanaras attacking their walls and attempting to scale them, were seized ere they fell by the Vanaras and hurled back with fatal effect on the very Rakshasas crowding the walls. The advance of the Vanaras gained in momentum as the fight progressed. They killed the Rakshasas wherever and whenever they caught them. As a giant storm scatters the clouds into the four directions, the mounting onslaught of the Vanaras so dismayed the Rakshasas that they fled into the distance and the City was shrouded in despair.

Women, old men, and children began blaming Ravana for bringing about the calamity that had descended on their

heads. Some Rakshasas gave up the fight, and fled with their wives and children, in order to escape certain death. Noticing such groups, Ravana gnashed his teeth in anger and yelled, “Cowards, backing out of battle! I shall cut you into pieces with my Diamond Sword!” At this, a few of the fleeing Rakshasas stayed in the fray. Meanwhile, the Vanara heroes penetrated the enemy lines and reinforced by their contemplation on Rama they entered the inner fortress of Ravana himself, and succeeded in razing it to the ground. They plucked a pillar of gold and wielding it as a weapon, started their orgy of destruction. Every Rakshasa they encountered was given a terrible beating. Then, his head was severed and cast away, with such force and such aim that it fell right in front of Ravana himself. When darkness fell, the Vanaras, after demonstrating their superior might and heroism before the Rakshasas, presented themselves before Rama.

The Rakshasas are nocturnal beings, so when night fell, their acclamation and fury increased manyfold. Their shouts of “Victory to Ravana” fell on the ears of the Vanaras like the roar of lions. The Vanaras plunged into battle again. The Rakshasa generals, Akampa and Athikaya through their magical skill spread pitch darkness over the four quarters. Under cover of the blackness, heavy rains of dust, stones and blood were poured on the enemy forces. The Vanaras could not distinguish friend from foe. They were afraid to fight with full fury. They prayed, “Rama! Rama,” in a loud voice, so that they could gain courage and give the enemy

a good fight. Rama heard their cries. He called together Angada and Hanuman and told them that the magic skill of the Rakshasas had caused the commotion. They were furious at the shameful tactics of the enemy, but Rama coolly pulled out the Agneyastra, the Fire-arrow from his sheath, and shot it into the darkness they had designed. The effulgence of that arrow destroyed the darkness, and filled the area with splendid illumination. The Vanaras and the Bears set about their task of overwhelming and destroying the enemy with redoubled energy and enthusiasm. When the triumphant yell of Angada and Hanuman were heard, the Rakshasas took to their heels and fled. But they could not escape. The Vanaras caught them by their feet and threw them far out into the sea! The Rakshasas retreated into their camp when night advanced. They had no energy left for continuing the fight. The Vanaras came into the Presence of Rama. When the eyes of Rama fell upon them, they were all refreshed and recouped, with no trace of exhaustion.

Meanwhile, Ravana summoned his ministers and addressed them thus: “This day, thousands of Rakshasas were slain on the battlefield by the Vanaras. We have now to plan our strategy to foil them.” Then up rose Malyavantha, the aged Minister who had served Ravana’s father and who was also the father of Ravana’s mother. He counselled various rightful and moral paths for his edification. “Ravana,” he began, very endearingly, “Listen to my words in calmness. Pardon me for being outright. Ever since you brought Sita here, bad omens have been

witnessed. It is not possible to describe them in detail. The glory of Rama, the Supreme Person, cannot be measured and extolled adequately even by the Vedas. By opposing this Cosmic Person, this Virat Purusha, you cannot earn any good, or win any grace. You would do well to ponder over this calmly. Rama is the very Person who slew Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksha. He is the repository of all virtues. Do not entertain hatred against Him. Oh Emperor! Save Lanka, I pray. Surrender Sita to Rama. Do not delay any longer. Your safety lies in immediate surrender.” Thus saying, Malyavantha bowed his head and performed obeisance to the Ruler. These words hurt Ravana. He was infuriated. He ejaculated, “You seem to be determined to enter the jaws of Death. Your senility is pleading with me to pardon you; or else, I would have hacked you to pieces. Beware, get up and go out of my sight.” Ravana hissed like an angry serpent. Malyavantha felt sorry, for he feared Ravana’s end was fast approaching. He laughed within himself at the conceit and ignorance that had blinded Ravana. He concluded that he was yielding to ruinous reasoning and foolish reactions, brushing aside the advice that would save him and his empire, because destiny had decided to close his career.

At that moment, Meghanada rose and said, “Father, do not hesitate. Tomorrow, during the morning hours, you can witness my skill in war. I shall demonstrate in action much more than I declare in words.” His assurance mollified Ravana’s anger and assuaged him a little. He was filled

with joy. It gave him courage and hope. He drew his son near and caressed him fondly. He patted his head and extolled, before all, the bravery and heroic heart of his son. The Assembly dispersed about midnight. Each member hied back to his own residence, but not one of them had a wink of sleep. Nor had anyone the appetite for food. All were sunk in anxiety and terror about the calamity which might overtake them any moment. Even as they were rolling in fear, dawn spread over the east. The Vanaras and the Bears laid siege to Lanka from all directions. Confusion and panic raised their heads. Their roars echoed from the sky. The Rakshasa warriors too had to take up arms and oppose them. They had no other alternative. The rain of rocks and hills that fell on the City from the walls around were fought back with arrows and other weapons from billions of Rakshasas. They too shouted and yelled, reverberating the sky as on doomsday. But the huge peaks and hilltops that the Vanaras threw at them reduced the Rakshasa hordes into a mass of lifeless pulp.

Enraged at the news that the Vanaras had rushed into the City, Meghanada took up arms and advanced to attack them. The hordes that followed him, beat their war drums and sounded their clarions. Meghanada was famous as Indrajit, for he had once overwhelmed in battle no less a person than Indra, the Ruler of the Gods. He was the chief among Lanka’s generals and a terrible warrior. The Vanaras lost courage when they espied him on his chariot. Sighting the flight of the enemy forces, Meghanada shouted in joy

and stringing his mighty bow, he shot a rain of arrows upon them. Drawing the string right back to his ear, he shot the arrows fast and furious. They flew like winged serpents in all directions. So the Vanaras were afraid to face him. They lost the urge to fight and retreated. Some were felled by arrows, others fainted and fell. Witnessing the pitiable plight of the Vanaras, Hanuman was overcome with rage. He hastened towards Meghanada, full of fury appearing as the God of Death Himself! He plucked a mountain peak that was nearby and threw it at the Rakshasa leader. As soon as he saw the peak rushing towards him like the messenger of Death, Meghanada used his magical skill to rise up into the sky. His chariot, the horses and the charioteer were all crushed underneath that peak as it fell exactly where it was aimed. Meghanada designed many other magic stratagems. But his design to create terror in Hanuman was as ineffective as the attempt of a miniature snake to terrorise the King of Eagles, Garuda. He showered fire from the sky. He rained blood. He spread thick night, when day was bright. The darkness was so dense that one could not see his own palm spread before his eyes. The Vanaras were confused and rendered despondent by such tactics. They felt that their end had come.

Rama saw the tricks into which the Rakshasas had descended in their despair. He laughed within himself at their helplessness. He became aware that the Vanaras had lost confidence and courage. So he shot one single arrow into the fray. The magic of the Rakshasa was mortally hit

and it no longer worked. Brightness was restored to the earth, as if the Sun had risen in the sky. The Vanaras recovered self-confidence and advanced towards the Rakshasa ranks. The compassionate glance of Rama fell upon them and they were refreshed. The entire Vanara horde shouted with one voice, “Jai,” “Jai for our Lord, Rama,” and pressed forward against all odds. Nothing could halt them. No one could delay their advance. To heighten courage and quicken their pace, Lakshmana joined Hanuman, and with his mighty bow and sharp arrows he fell upon Meghanada. Ravana heard that Lakshmana had jumped into the fray and so he hastened to send strong reinforcements to support his son on the field. The Vanaras fought without respite, armed with tree and rocks. Both sides fought ferociously with unabated fury. Most of the fight centred round duels between warriors and leaders. The Vanaras hit with their clenched fists and bit with their sharp teeth. This caused the death of a vast number of Rakshasas. They clipped with their nails many a head from the shoulders on which they rested. They pulled many a hand from the sockets in which they were fastened. The yell of victory with which the Vanaras announced their triumph resounded among the Nine Islands. Headless corpses of the Rakshasas continued to run along the directions which the Rakshasas had taken while alive. Seeing this eerie phenomenon, the Vanaras broke into ribald laughter. The roads that criss-crossed over the vast field of battle were filled with streams of blood.

Lakshmana and Meghanada were involved in deadly combat. Each appeared the other's equal in skill and strength. Indrajit decided to defeat Lakshmana by magic stratagem rather than by the tactics of war. But even these were foiled and his plans ended in failure. Lakshmana in a spurt of terrific rage destroyed the chariot of Meghanada and killed his charioteer. Afraid that his death was imminent, Meghanada took on hand the supremely potent weapon, Sakti, that Brahma had gifted, and aiming It at the very heart of Lakshmana, he directed It to the target. The weapon hit the heart of Lakshmana, coming straight from Meghanada's hand. Lakshmana fell on the ground, in a "mortal" swoon. Meghanada, now no longer in fear, approached the fallen hero and tried to lift the body away to his own camp. Though his strength was equal to Lakshmana's, Meghanada could not raise the body. Countless warriors came forward to help him; but numbers were of no avail. Lakshmana was the Primeval Serpent, that bears the Cosmos on Its Thousand Hoods, Adishesha, come again. How could anyone however strong or any number of such ones succeed in lifting him? Only those who have won the Grace of Sri Rama could move Lakshmana!

Meanwhile, the shades of evening invaded the land. The two opposing forces returned to their camps. Sri Rama saw the returning Vanaras but could not see Lakshmana among them. He asked, "Where is Lakshmana?" Just at that moment, Hanuman entered carrying the body of

Lakshmana over his shoulder. Hanuman was praying plaintively, "Rama! Rama!" Rama acted as if he was perturbed and affected by anxiety, but he soon righted himself. He laid the body of Lakshmana on his lap and examined it carefully for a long time. Jambavan, the aged, spoke at that juncture. He said, "Lord. Let us not lose time. Let us not delay treatment or hesitate. It is best we get Sushena here, the physician, from Lanka. He knows the remedy." That very minute, Hanuman assumed a microscopic human form and entered the inner city of Lanka. Even while moving in, he was hurt by a doubt whether Sushena would comply with his request to come into the camp of Rama. So Hanuman resorted to a ruse. He lifted the house of Sushena with him inside it, and brought it intact over the intervening distance. When Sushena emerged, he found himself in the presence of Rama himself. Sushena fell at the feet of Rama, and disclosed the name of the mountain where the drug, which could save Lakshmana, was growing. While considering whom to send in search of that precious drug, Hanuman himself prostrated before the lotus feet of his Lord, and prayed that he might be enjoined to bring it. Rama entrusted the task to him.

Meanwhile, one of his spies reported to Ravana that Sushena, the physician, had reached the presence of Rama. Ravana consulted Kalanemi on this new development and its consequences. Kalanemi replied, "Ravana! This Hanuman is an impossible person! Did he not set Lanka in flames even when you were looking on? What special skill

or strength do I have to contain and conquer this Hanuman? The time to do the right is still not past. Give up the absurd notion that it is possible for you to win a victory over Rama. Go, take refuge at the feet of Rama. Your fortunes will get better thereby. Forsake your pride and obstinacy.” Kalanemi gave Ravana good counsel, but what he looked for was something different. Therefore, Ravana condemned him. Shaking with rage, he shouted. “Are you prepared to obey me? If not, prepare yourself for death.” Kalanemi thought that it would be much more beneficial to die at the hands of Rama than being killed by Ravana. So, he left for Rama’s camp. Exercising his magical skills, he sought a lake in the centre of a lovely park, and wearing the robes of a rishi, he sat in deep meditation on its bank. Hanuman who was on his way to the mountain range where the life-saving drug was to be found, was exhausted, since he had had no rest after the fierce engagement with Meghanada. He felt that a few moments’ rest and a drink from the cool lake would be worthwhile, for he could proceed thereafter all the quicker. Hanuman fell at the feet of the rishi, who was reciting the name of Rama and extolling his exploits and excellences. He was delighted. He too sang the Name “Rama! Rama!” The disguised Kalanemi told him further, “Oh Vanara! There is a war being fought between Rama and Ravana. I am watching it every day from here. There is no doubt that Rama will soon emerge as victor without fail.” Hanuman was elated at this. He told the sage that he was thirsty. The sage told him that his water vessel had cool refreshing water and he offered it to him. Hanuman said, “Master, this little

quantity cannot quench my thirst to any appreciable degree.” Then the rishi told him that there was a lake nearby and he could have a dip in its limpid waters and also drink his fill, in order to get refreshed. Hanuman agreed and proceeded towards the lake indicated. He stepped into the lake, until his feet were immersed in the water; just then, a crocodile crept up from within the lake and held his foot in its vile grip. Of course, it could not do any further harm. Hanuman shook it off and bit it to death. As soon as its crocodile life ended, it stood before Hanuman as a resplendent Heavenly Being. Hanuman was surprised at this vision. He asked the Appearance, “Who are you?” That person answered, “Oh Servant of Rama! My load of sin melted away when I had the good luck of seeing you and being touched by you. Kalanemi and I were musicians, Gandharvas, at the Court of Indra in Heaven. One day, the sage, Durvasa, celebrated for his short temper, arrived at Court. When our eyes fell on that wild ferocious figure, we burst into laughter. So he cursed both of us to be born on earth as Rakshasas. We pleaded for mercy, holding his feet and shedding tears of contrition. He took compassion on us and said, ‘Well! You will take birth in Lanka. The Lord will be incarnating as Rama, in the last quarter of the Thretha Age and a terrible battle will ensue between Rama and the Ruler of Lanka. During that battle, Lakshmana, the brother, will get fatally hurt by the weapon called Sakthi and Hanuman, a devoted servant of Rama, will be journeying to the Sanjiva Mountain, green with bushes of drugs. You will both be liberated from the Rakshasa encumbrance by contact with

him.' Oh Vanara! The rishi who lives near by, who directed you here, is no rishi at all. He is a Rakshasa in disguise. He is named Kalanemi.”

Hanuman approached Kalanemi, and shouted in his ear, “Dear Preceptor! Accept the offering I propose to make in return for the lesson you taught me. You are my Guru and I have to pay you fees.” What had happened was that Kalanemi had wondered why Hanuman had taken such a long time to quench his thirst and return, and he had guessed that the reason was the revelation of his own identity and history by his brother who was living his curse out there, as a crocodile. So, Kalanemi pretended to be too deeply involved in *dhyaana* (meditation) to recognise the person who stood before him and accosted him. Hanuman knew the disguise that Kalanemi was hiding under. He caught hold of his neck and twisted it fast until he died, with the words, “Rama! Rama!” emerging from his lips with the last breath.

Kicking aside the corpse, Hanuman hastened towards the Drona Mountain Range and reaching the Sanjiva Hill, started looking for the drug he had come for. But he failed to identify it among the plentiful vegetation with which the hill was carpeted thick. Time was running out. His return was already much delayed. He was conscious of the urgency of Rama’s Command. He resorted to another plan. He plucked the entire hill and leapt through the sky carrying it on his palm.

He had to pass over the City of Ayodhya on his way to Lanka during the hours of night. Bharatha was at that time pining alone, wakeful but worried about his brother and his life in the forest. Suddenly, the moonlight was darkened by a shadow, the shadow of Hanuman and the hill falling upon him. Bharatha inferred that the monkey with the mountain load must be a Rakshasa that had assumed that form proceeding on some wicked mission. He decided to destroy it before it could accomplish any mischief. Seizing his bow, he shot an arrow at it, drawing the string right back to the ear and with good aim. When the arrow struck him, Hanuman gave out a shrill cry, “Rama!”

When that name fell on his ears, Bharatha stood up shocked and ran towards the fallen monkey. From Hanuman he learnt the story of his mission and the urgency of his errand. He was overcome with grief. He embraced Hanuman and pleaded that he must be pardoned for his foolish haste. Bharatha broke into tears. He prayed, “If it is true that I have adored Rama through thought, word and deed and that I have not deviated from this path, let this Vanara be restored to his original health and strength.”

When Bharatha lamented so deeply and took so firm a vow, Hanuman was relieved of his pain. He rose up fresh and free. Then a thought entered into him, to test the sincerity of Bharatha. He said, “Victory to the Lord of the Raghu Dynasty.” At this, Bharatha’s heart was so struck by anguish that he broke into loud sobs. He pleaded, “Oh Chief of Monkeys! Are Sita, Rama and Lakshmana keeping well?

My mother, Sita, is she happy and in good spirits?” Bharatha shed tears of joy when he recollected the absent Sita and his brothers. At this, Hanuman related to him all that had happened. Bharatha was overwhelmed with sorrow when he heard the narration. He fainted and fell on the ground, when he heard that Lakshmana had lost consciousness on the field of battle. Recovering soon, Bharatha rose and said, “Hanuman! Pardon me for my foolish act. I ought not to cause any further delay. Hasten with Sanjivi Hill, with the precious drug that can cure him. Proceed fast.”

Hanuman fell at the feet of Bharatha and raised aloft the Hill on his palm. When he took off and flew into the horizon, Bharatha watched him with unwinking eyes, until he disappeared from view. He was glad that at last he was able to secure some knowledge of the movements of Rama, but he was full of grief at the condition of Sita and of Lakshmana. With a heavy heart, he went home and communicated the story to the mothers.

Sumitra, the mother of Lakshmana, though saddened for awhile, quickly recovered her composure, reminding herself that Rama was present by the side of her son. She told herself, “The son born of my loins is offering his very life, in the service of Rama! That is enough consolation for me. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction. My life has attained fulfilment. But I am concerned, because Rama must be afflicted at the fate of Lakshmana. This ‘loss of consciousness’ must be affecting him. Separation from his brother might cause him grief. Son, Satrughna, go to where

Rama is and be by his side!” At this Satrughna stood up in readiness saying, “What greater good fortune can fall to my lot?” But Bharatha stopped him and said, “Without specific orders from Rama, I am unable to agree to your joining him.” Bharatha comforted Satrughna, and told him that Rama might dislike this act, and that it was always beneficial to bow to his will.

Meanwhile, in Lanka, Rama was guarding Lakshmana. The day rolled into evening and night and even into the hour of midnight. The Vanaras were squatting around Rama. Rama, acting as merely human, expressed anxiety at the non-arrival of Hanuman. “It is midnight. There is yet no sign of Hanuman! Has he lost his way by any chance? Brother Lakshmana is still critically unconscious!” He turned the face of Lakshmana tenderly towards him, and fondling it with tearful affection, said, “Brother! Open your eyes and look at me. Never have you spent such long hours without turning your eyes towards me. Without even a wink you watched over me, all these years, with no respite. How can I bear this silence from you? Since yesterday, I have none to comfort me with soft speech.” Rama wailed thus, like common mortals. “Brother, for my sake, you forsook both parents and wife. You came into exile and forest life, along with me, though you were under no obligation to do so. You never paid attention to the hardships you encountered. Your nature is simple and sweet. But for my sake you welcomed the hot sun, you got wet in the rain, and you shivered in the cold. You would not take food, at

mealtime; for, you had no regular hours. You gave me whatever food you collected. Lakshmana, I am not unaware of the fact that often you laid yourself on the bare ground on an empty stomach. Brother! For twelve long hours I am deprived of loving care, do you not realise this? Lakshmana! Open your eyes just once and look upon me. That is what I most need now.” Rama held the chin of Lakshmana in his loving hand and prayed most touchingly for one glance from his eye. The Vanaras shed tears of sorrow at the anguish that Rama experienced. Many of them climbed the hilltop trees and peered into the distance to discover signs of the approach of Hanuman.

Soon, Hanuman appeared carrying the Sanjivi Peak on his upraised palm. Hanuman shone before their eyes as the embodiment of courage, made more loveable by the splendour of compassion. He touched ground and came among the Vanaras. The Vanaras shouted, “Hail! Hail!” They said, “You have made our lives worthwhile. Had you not come before dawn, we would all have plunged into the ocean and ended our lives, for we could not have survived Lakshmana or cared to exist without him. You have saved our lives.” When Rama saw Hanuman with the Peak on which the curative plants were growing, his delight was beyond measure. Sushena immediately secured the drugs he required—the Visalyakarini, the Samdhanakarini, the Souvarnakarini and the Samjivakarini—from the Peak and administered them to Lakshmana. Lakshmana sat up, fully awake. Rama was overcome with joy. He embraced his

brother and caressed him very fondly. He exclaimed, “Brother! Brother! Where had you been these hours?” His eyes were streaming with tears of joy and gratitude. He was plunged in high delight, comparable only to Brahmik Bliss. Meanwhile, as a result of contact with the vitalising air that blew from the Sanjivi Peak in their midst, the Vanaras who had fallen dead during the days of bitter battle recovered their lives and were able to sit up and move about as before. This produced great joy among the Vanaras, who danced in glee, embracing their revived companions and kinsfolk. Rama showered his blessings on Sushena. He assured Sushena that he would guard him against any vengeful steps that Ravana might plan against him. He ordered Hanuman to deposit him back again in Lanka, house and all, and also to deposit the precious Sanjivi Peak near his house, in memory of his service to Lakshmana and the Vanaras. Hanuman praised his services and thanked him for saving the life of his master as well as those of his companions. He carried his house, with him in it, as well as the Peak and placed them safely on the ground in Lanka.

Another day dawned. War drums could be heard from the Rakshasa camp. The Vanaras were agog with excitement. They drew enormous strength from the thought of Rama, their guardian and guide. Each of them was filled with the might of many elephants. They all jumped about, impatient, to start the fray. That day the enemy generalissimo was Dhoomraksha. He fought desperately, but he was killed the next day by Hanuman. At this, Akampa stepped into

the breach and fought ferociously at the head of the demonic horde. Angada led the Vanaras against Akampa, and he was able to kill the Rakshasa general that very day. Hearing that Akampa had met his death at the hands of the enemy, Prahastha rushed into the battlefield raising a great hue and cry. Nila took him on; and remembering ever more keenly the name of Rama, he engaged him furiously. Leaping on him with terrible ferocity, Nila succeeded in killing the new general, Prahastha. Mahodara came next. Hanuman jumped on him with a reverberating roar, and fought with him, tooth and nail. Soon, he was able to cut Mahodara into pieces.

For five long days thereafter, the two sons of Kumbhakarna, Kumbha and Nikumbha, continued the fight, at the head of a phalanx of fierce Rakshasas. On the sixth day, both brothers reached the Heaven that warrior heroes attain when they die on the field of battle.

Observing the unbroken series of calamities that rained upon their forces, the Rakshasas of Lanka were stricken with panic. They were struggling to hide themselves somewhere in order to save their lives. Many surrendered and sought refuge in the Camp of Vanaras. They blamed Ravana and abused him bitterly. Many proceeded to Queen Mandodari and prayed to her to arrest the train of disaster. She too was sad that Ravana had yielded to his mad impulses, and she tried to dissuade him away from the war.

But the war went on unabated. Makaraksha, the redoubtable warrior, continued the battle. Lakshmana

opposed him and killed him. When such signal success was accomplished in a trice, the Vanaras leaped in joy and shouted, “Jai! Jai!” Ravana wailed and wept when he heard that his unbeatable generals had all, one by one, fallen dead on the ground! He ran towards the place where his brother, Kumbhakarna, lay asleep, and he attempted to awaken him by urgent and drastic means. Vast crowds of Rakshasas gathered near his ears and beat huge drums wildly. Ravana brought hundreds of boxers who hit the sleeping demon. Hundreds rained punches on him with their fisticuffs. Many dealt heavy thrusts on his thighs, with gigantic maces. At last, the eyes opened, and the demon looked around. Ravana related his despair to him. He told him of the death of his own sons. That made him rise in red vengeance, as if he was the very embodiment of Time, the Universal Destroyer. He exclaimed, “Fool, can victory be ever achieved by you? You have tarnished yourselves unpardonably by the sin of stealing and bringing away Sita, the Mother of the Universe. Your wicked act is inexcusably heinous. Your viciousness is bringing destruction on Lanka. Go, surrender to Rama at least now, regardless of your absurd sense of prestige! Was it right, for a ruler charged with the high duty of maintaining righteousness and suppressing unrighteousness in his kingdom, to cast off propriety and good conduct, and abduct another’s wife? Has this the approval of ethics? Is it conducive to spiritual progress? You have to suffer the fruits of your actions. Ravana! Rama is no ordinary mortal. Surpanakha, our sister, was maddened by lust. She planned to achieve her selfish desire and she suffered the

consequence of her wickedness. She set your instinct on fire, and induced you to enact this barbarous crime. Listening to a wily woman, you cast aside all discrimination, and brought on your head this calamity by the mischief of your own hands.” Kumbhakarna laid the blame on his own brother and advised him for long. But Ravana was in no mood to accept the blame. “Do not desert me in disaster. Prepare yourselves for leading our armies into the war. Save my life,” he pleaded.

Finding no means of escape, and overcome by affection for the brother, Kumbhakarna got ready. They placed cauldrons of toddy and mounds of meat before him, so that he might breakfast on them. Gulping the whole lot in a moment, Kumbhakarna proceeded to the battlefield. Seeing him enter the fray, Vibhishana, his younger brother, ran forward from Rama’s camp and fell at his feet in humble reverence. Rising up, he announced himself by name. Kumbhakarna beamed in joy. He embraced his brother with loving tenderness. Vibhishana was the first to speak. He said, “Brother! Ravana insulted me in open court and kicked me out of the Audience Hall. I considered all aspects of this affair and counselled him in various ways. He discarded my advice and gave ear to power-mad foolish ministers. He hurled unbearable abuses on me, within the hearing of those persons. I could not suffer the shame of it. I surrendered to Rama; and knowing that I was helpless and innocent, he accepted me and granted me refuge.” At this, Kumbhakarna replied, “Well, brother! The shadow of Death

is already on Ravana. How then can he pay heed to good counsel? Surely, you have done well to fulfil the goal of your life. You are not Vibhishana now, you are *Vibhushana* (the shining jewel, the most splendid ornament) of the Rakshasa clan! You have ennobled and purified the clan by serving so ardently the very Ocean of Happiness, the Crown of the Raghu Dynasty, Rama. Go, serve him with sincere zeal. Brother! I have to engage in battle regardless of the fate in store for me. I am also nearing Death. Ravana knows that my heart is not with him. I advise you to give up loyalty to this side or that, but confine yourself to loyalty to Rama.” Receiving this advice and the blessings of his brother, Vibhishana returned to the presence of Rama. He told Rama, “Lord! That mountain of a Rakshasa is Kumbhakarna. He is a ferociously brave fighter. He has come to engage you in battle.”

When the Vanaras heard these words, they were so angry that they spouted fire and leaped under the leadership of Hanuman on the enemy forces. They threw huge trees and enormous boulders at him. But Kumbhakarna stood firm and unaffected. The Vanara attack was like hitting a mad elephant with an eyelash! Boiling with anger, Hanuman administered a mighty blow with his clenched fist and Kumbhakarna reeled. But recovering soon he returned the blow, and felled him to the ground. Nala and Nila now joined the fight. They too could not withstand the might of Kumbhakarna. Fear seized the Vanara hordes. Sugriva and Angada had their share of the mighty Kumbhakarna’s

onslaught and they rolled on the ground. At last, Kumbhakarna squeezed Sugriva under his arm and carried him off the field. Kumbhakarna asserted that, by carrying the King off, he had vanquished the Vanara Army.

Meanwhile, Hanuman regained awareness of the state of things. He found Sugriva was not around. He got anxious to discover his whereabouts. While being carried away, pressed under the arm of the mighty Kumbhakarna, Sugriva recovered consciousness and he tried his best to wriggle out of the hold. Hanuman found him engaged in this desperate bid and ran to render him help. However, Sugriva separated himself from his captor and started a valiant fight against him. He bit off the nose and ears of Kumbhakarna, and the monster had, as a consequence, enormous difficulty to breathe. Soon, a horde of Vanaras yelling, “Victory to Rama” “Victory to our Master,” surrounded Kumbhakarna and rained rocks, hills and trees on him. The infuriated demon leaped on the Vanaras and catching whomsoever he could lay his hands on, he crunched them and swallowed them. Many were crushed to death. Thus Kumbhakarna was able to scatter the Vanaras in panic.

At this, Rama told Lakshmana and others that the time had come when he had to enter the field. His intercession could not be delayed any longer. “Lakshmana! Bring that ‘inexhaustible’ arrow sheath hither,” he said. Bearing the command of Rama on his head, he brought the sheath immediately and placed it in his brother’s hands. Armed with the Kodanda Bow, Rama walked into the battle area,

like a lion towards its prey. Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman and Jambavan followed him. The arrows from Rama’s bow flew fast like winged serpents straight at the foe. They spread all over the place and penetrated the four quarters. They destroyed millions of heroes and warriors in the enemy ranks. Unable to stand the onslaught of the arrows, the Rakshasas fled. The stream of arrows never got dry, every arrow that was shot returned back into the same sheath after inflicting the injury intended. Realising that Rama was out to exterminate the Rakshasa forces, Kumbhakarna was terribly enraged. He roared like a wounded lion and jumped into the midst of the fray. The Vanaras were alarmed. They fled in fear. Finding that no other plan was feasible, Rama aimed an arrow at Kumbhakarna and sliced off his hands at the shoulders. At this, the monster shone like the Mandara Mountain, when its wings were sliced off by the Lord of Gods, Indra. He rushed towards Rama with a shriek. Rama drew the bowstring full behind the ear and let go a bunch of arrows that struck with deadly force all over his face. Kumbhakarna reeled at the impact but did not fall. So, Rama shot another arrow which severed his head and felled it to the ground. When the head was sliced off, the trunk continued to run for some distance, and to prevent this movement, Rama shot another arrow which cut it in twain.

Suddenly, a splendour arose from the body and advancing towards Rama merged in him. The Rakshasa attained liberation without performing any *Sadhana* or *Japa* (Recitation of Name) or *Thapas* (Austerity for Sense

Control and Mind Control). While alive, he shone like an incomparable hero on the battlefield; dead, he attained the highest state of Mergence with God. Rama stood on the field, with a sprinkling of sweat drops on his lotus face. His body revealed a few drops of Kumbhakarna's blood that had fallen on it during the fight. It was the hour of dusk. Both armies had had a fierce hot day of ferocious fighting. They retired into their camps. The Grace bestowed by Rama reinforced the spirits of the Vanaras. Like fire fed by dry grass, the flame of their ardour rose high.

The Rakshasas lost strength, night and day. Ravana bewailed inconsolably. He was a cobra that had lost its crest jewel. Pressing his brother's severed head to his bosom, he wept aloud. Meghanada, his son, tried to soothe him in various ways. "Tomorrow I shall demonstrate before you my heroic might. I shall, in a trice, smash this Vanara horde out of shape. I shall confer on you joy immensely greater than the grief you are burdened with today," he boasted. Very soon, dawn broke. Ravana was informed by messengers that the bears and monkeys had surrounded the City. This drew the indomitable warriors among the Rakshasas into the struggle. They marched forth to meet the enemy. Each fought with whomsoever he encountered to the utmost of his skill and strength. The whole of that day, the fury was indescribably frightening. Meghanada ascended his magic chariot and rose into the sky. His challenging roar thundered like clouds in the doomsday sky. That roar felled the Vanaras to the ground, as if by a

mighty blow. The earth shuddered at its echo. In a moment, he contrived a pseudo-Sita and, seating her in the chariot, he came down along the battlefield! Hanuman noticed this before everyone else. And accosting him, Meghanada shouted, "Listen, Hanuman! This Sita, to recover whom, you are waging this war, I am killing her this moment. Look, with her death, this war must end," and drawing his sword, he cut her to pieces and cast them away, Hanuman was plunged in vengeful rage. He called upon the Vanaras to fight on, with no thought of survival, and exterminate the Rakshasa brood. The Vanaras attacked them so ferociously that the Rakshasas fell back into the City.

Hanuman approached Rama and reported to him the wicked deed performed by Meghanada. As soon as he heard the news, Rama pretended to be affected by it. He was not unaware of the fact that it was a pseudo-Sita contrived through the magic skill of the Rakshasas. Still, he acted as if he was just a "man among men." Lakshmana too was down with despair. He grieved at the loss of the Mother of all the Worlds, and sat despondent at the futility of continuing in this world. Hearing reports of what had happened, Vibhishana rushed to the presence of Rama. He said, "Master! You know the truth of this. The entire incident is a fake. Sita is alive and guarded with great care. Ravana alone can have access to the place where she is kept under guard. Meghanada has only designed a 'Sita' and killed her in order to deceive us into despair. Among us Rakshasas such tricks are very common. I know how they revel in

such mean stratagems.” Rama and Lakshmana were happy when they heard him, and they appreciated his exposure of the secret tactics of the Rakshasas. In order to confirm the statement of Vibhishana and to satisfy himself all the more, Hanuman assumed another form and entering Lanka City unnoticed by anyone, he went to the park where Sita was kept under guard, and returning, he assured the Vanaras that all was well. This urged the Vanaras to greater enthusiasm in battle.

Meghanada returned to the battle very soon. He rained on the Vanaras this time not only sharp arrows, but spears, maces, axes, pestles, and boulders. The Vanaras heard terror-striking shouts and commands reverberating all around them. “Beat,” “Hold,” etc., but they could not see who were obeying those orders and beating them, hacking them and holding them fast! It was an eerie experience which spread confusion among them. They were unable to decide whence the danger came and where they had to turn for refuge. Even redoubtable heroes like Nala, Nila, Angada and Hanuman were filled with fear. Meghanada aimed arrows at Lakshmana, Sugriva and Vibhishana and pierced their bodies. But they fought against him nevertheless with unabated fury. Meanwhile, Meghanada engaged Rama himself in battle. He showered hissing serpent-arrows on him. It was the renowned Dragon Weapon, the Sarpastra. Rama, the Supreme Actor come in the Human Role, the mighty Hero who destroyed Khara, Dooshana and their phalanxes, allowed himself to be bound by the effects of

that powerful weapon, the Sarpastra! In order to give due respect to that Divine Dragon and to demonstrate its potency, he permitted it to harm him! This may seem strange, but this is the story of Rama, come with attributes, qualities and limitations. So people with limited capacities of thought, word and deed cannot discover this Truth. The Vanaras were rendered helpless and worried, because Rama had been overpowered by the weapon of the Dragon. Meghanada was overjoyed. He rushed among the Vanaras, spouting vulgar abuse.

Jambavan saw him. “Oh you Vicious Worm! Stop,” he cried. Meghanada brushed him aside, saying, “Fie on you, I had ignored you so far, as too old to deserve attention. Of what avail are your words to me? Move away.” He threw a trident at Jambavan, which was luckily caught by him and thrown back at Meghanada himself. The aim was so correct and the throw was so forceful, that the trident hit him straight on the heart. The wounded man circled round himself a few times and fell on the ground. Jambavan rushed to where he fell. He held the feet together and swung him round very fast before he dashed him on the ground. “Now say whether I am an old man. Judge whether I have strength of youth or the weakness of old age.” Jambavan challenged Meghanada. Meghanada did not die. He rose with great difficulty and moved away. He had not fulfilled his boast, and so, he felt ashamed to show his face before his father. He went straight to a garden named Nikumbala, where many Rakshasas had performed penance and endured austerities in the past.

Four courtiers of Vibhishana who were watching incognito the movements of the enemy leaders came to know about this and they reported the fact to him. He hurried to Rama and said, “Master! I listened to a bit of news just now. Meghanada is about to perform a malignant *Yajna* (sacrifice) to propitiate evil powers. If he completes the ceremonies, it will be hard to defeat him. We will have to hurl obstacles.” Rama appreciated the suggestion, and was pleased with his words. He summoned Hanuman and Angada and told them. “Brothers! Go! Disturb and disorganise the Yagna which Meghanada is observing.” He turned to Lakshmana and said, “Lakshmana! You have to defeat this fellow on the field of battle. Note that gods are grieving on account of his iniquities.” No sooner had he ordered so, than Vibhishana, Sugriva and Hanuman—the three—collected a huge force of Vanaras and followed Lakshmana in order to give him support. Lakshmana armed himself with the bow and the ever-full arrow-sheath, and after prostrating before Rama, he moved out of the camp, with Rama installed in his heart. Angada, Nala, Nila and other generals walked behind Hanuman.

When they reached the Nikumbala Park, they found the Sacrifice already on and the flesh and blood of buffaloes being offered in the ritual fire. They started disturbing the ceremonies. Meghanada did not however desist. Then they began to loudly caricature the hymns uttered by them to propitiate the Forces, but that did not persuade the priests to stop the rituals. The infuriated Vanaras rushed into the

sacrificial area, and catching Meghanada by the hair, they pulled him to the ground and kicked him. Meghanada took hold of the trident and pounced upon them. Angada and Hanuman fell on him, and were hit with the trident. The blow was so hard that both of them rolled on the ground. Lakshmana came to their rescue. He broke the terrible trident in two. Angada and Hanuman recovered soon and hit Meghanada with all their strength. However, the Rakshasa did not quail. He did not show any sign of the impact. Lakshmana rained deadly arrows on him, as if he were the God of Death come to kill him. Each one attacked him as if raining thunderbolts. So, using his magic skill, Meghanada rendered himself invisible. He assumed many a mysterious role and escaped. The patience of Lakshmana ran out at last. He fixed sacred arrows on his bow; and invoking on it the might and majesty of Rama, aimed it at Meghanada, wherever he might be. That arrow entered the heart of Meghanada and ended his life. Since, he had in his mind, during the last moments the image of Rama and Lakshmana, Angada, Hanuman and Vibhishana extolled his bravery and the way he died. Hanuman lifted his body lightly on his shoulders and carrying it to the City Gate of Lanka, placed it there and returned. Lakshmana approached Rama and prostrated at his feet. Rama was pleased at his success. He listened to the detailed narrative of the events at Nikumbala Park. He fondled his brother with great affection.