

and lips, and a face like the full moon—as she sat in the leaf hut tormented with grief and tears.

The blackhearted stalker of the night stole ever closer to Vaidehī, the woman dressed in garments of yellow silk, and with eyes like lotus petals.

With arrows of Manmatha, god of love, lodged deep within his heart, and the sounds of the *vedas*⁷ on his lips, the overlord of *rākṣasas* appeared before the deserted hut and courteously spoke.

Rāvaṇa began singing her praises, that loveliest of women in the three worlds, a radiant beauty, like the goddess Śrī herself without the lotus.

“Who are you, golden woman dressed in garments of yellow silk, wearing a lovely lotus garland, and like a lotus pond yourself?

“Are you the goddess Modesty or Fame? Are you Śrī or lovely Lakṣmī or perhaps an *apsaras*, lovely lady? Could you be Prosperity, shapely woman, or easygoing Pleasure?⁸

“Your teeth are bright white, tapered, and even; your eyes are large and clear, rosy at the corner, black in the center.

“Your hips are full and broad, your thighs smooth as an elephant’s trunk. And these, your delightful breasts, how round they are, so firm and gently heaving; how full and lovely, smooth as two palm fruits, with their nipples standing stiff and the rarest gems to adorn them.

“Graceful lady with your lovely smile, lovely teeth, and lovely eyes, you have swept my heart away like a river in flood that sweeps away its banks.

“Your waist I could compass with my fingers; how fine is your hair, how firm your breasts. No goddess, no *gandharva* woman, no *yakṣa* or *kinnara* woman, no mortal woman so beautiful have I ever seen before on the face of this earth.⁹

“Your beauty, unrivaled in all the worlds, your delicacy and youth, and the fact of your living here in the woods stir the deepest feelings in me.

“I urge you to go home, this is no place for you to be living. For this is the lair of dreaded *rākṣasas*, who can change their form at will.

“In the most delightful palaces, in luxuriant, fragrant city gardens is where you should be strolling.

Vishnu. *Apsaras* are celestial nymphs.
9. *Yakṣas* are yet another category of divine beings famous for their beauty.

“To my mind you deserve the finest garlands and beverages and raiment, and the finest husband, lovely black-eyed lady.

“Could you be one of the Rudras or Maruts, sweet-smiling, shapely woman, or one of the Vasus, perhaps? You look like a goddess to me.

“But *gandharvas* do not pass this way, nor do gods or *kinnaras*, for this is the lair of *rākṣasas*. How is it you have come here?

“There are monkeys here, lions, panthers, and tigers, apes, hyenas, and flesh-eating birds. How is it you do not fear them?

“And the dreaded elephants that go running wild, maddened by rut—how is it you do not fear them, lovely lady, all alone in the deep wilderness?

“Who are you, to whom do you belong, where do you come from, my precious, and why are you wandering all alone through Daṇḍaka, the haunt of dreaded *rākṣasas*?”

Such was the praise evil Rāvaṇa lavished on Vaidehī. But seeing he had come in the garb of a brahman, Maithilī honored him with all the acts of hospitality due a guest.

First she brought forward a cushion and offered water for his feet, and then she called him when food was ready, for he looked kindly enough.

When Maithilī observed that he had come in the garb of a twice-born¹—a brahman with a begging bowl and saffron robe; when she saw these accoutrements, it was impossible to refuse him, and so she extended him an invitation befitting a brahman.

“Here is a cushion, brahman, please be seated and accept this water for your feet. Here I have made ready for you the best fare the forest has to offer. You may partake of it freely.”

So Maithilī extended him a cordial invitation, and as Rāvaṇa gazed at her, the wife of the lord of men, he confirmed his resolve to take her by force, and with that, consigned himself to death.

Her husband in his honest garb had gone to hunt the magic deer, and she waited for him and Lakṣmaṇa, scanning the horizon. But she saw neither Rāma nor Lakṣmaṇa—only the deep, green forest.

SARGA 45

When Rāvaṇa came in the guise of a mendicant to carry off Vaidehī, he had first put some questions to her. Of her own accord she now began to tell her story.

For Sitā had thought a moment: “He is a brahman and my guest. If I do not reply he will curse me.” She then spoke these words:

1. A term used primarily of Brahmins (the teacher.)

"I am the daughter of Janaka, the great king of Mithilā. My name is Sītā, may it please the best of twice-born, and I am the wife of Rāma.

"For twelve years I lived in the house of Rāghava, enjoying such pleasures as mortals enjoy. I had all I could desire.

"Then, in the thirteenth year, the king in concert with his kingly counselors approved the royal consecration of my husband.

"But just as the preparations for Rāghava's consecration were under way, a mother-in-law of mine named Kaikeyī asked her husband for a boon.

"You see, Kaikeyī had already married my father-in-law for a consideration. So she had two things she now could ask of her husband, the best of kings and a man who always kept his word: One was the consecration of Bharata, the other, my husband's banishment.

"From this day forth I will not eat, or drink, or sleep, I will put an end to my life if Rāma is consecrated."

"Such were Kaikeyī's words, and though my father-in-law, who had always shown her respect, begged her with offers of commensurate riches, she would not do what he begged of her.

"Rāma, my mighty husband, was then twenty-five years old, and I had just passed my eighteenth birthday.

"His name is renowned throughout the world, his eyes are large, his arms strong. He is virtuous, honest, truthful, and devoted to the welfare of all people.

"When Rāma came into his father's presence for the consecration to begin, it was Kaikeyī who addressed my husband, in a rush of words:

"Listen to me, Rāghava, and hear what your father has decreed. The kingship is to be given to Bharata uncontested.

"As for you, you are to live in the forest for nine years and five. Go into banishment, Kākutstha, and save your father from falsehood."

"Without a trace of fear my husband Rāma answered Kaikeyī, 'So be it,' and in firm compliance with his vow did just as she had told him.

"For Rāma has taken a solemn vow, brahman, one never to be broken: always to give and not receive, to tell the truth and not lie.

"Rāma has a constant companion, his half brother Lakṣmaṇa, a tiger among men and mighty slayer of enemies in battle.

"This brother Lakṣmaṇa, who keeps to the ways of righteousness, firm in his vows, followed bow in hand when Rāma went into banishment with me.

"And so the three of us were driven from the kingdom for the sake of Kaikeyī. Thus it is under compulsion, best of twice-born, that we now wander the dense forest.

"Rest a moment; or you can even pass the night here if you like. My husband will soon return bringing an abundance of food from the forest.

"But can you just tell me your name, your clan, and family? How is it that you, a brahman, wander all alone in Daṇḍaka wilderness?"

So Sītā, wife of Rāma, spoke, and powerful Rāvaṇa, overlord of *rākṣasas*, made a reply that froze her blood:

"I am he who terrifies the worlds, with all their gods, *asuras*, and great serpents. I am Rāvaṇa, Sītā, supreme lord of the hosts of *rākṣasas*.

"Now that I have set eyes on you, flawless, golden lady dressed in silk, I shall no longer take any pleasure in my own wives.

"From one place and another I have carried off many splendid women. May it please you to become chief queen over every one of them.

"In the middle of the ocean lies my vast city Laṅkā, perched upon a mountain peak and ringed by the sea.

"There, my radiant Sītā, you shall stroll with me through the forests, never longing for this life you are leading in the wilderness.

"Five thousand slave women all adorned with ornaments shall wait upon you hand and foot, Sītā, if you become my wife."

So Rāvaṇa spoke, but Janaka's daughter, that faultless beauty, angrily and with utter contempt for the *rākṣasa* replied:

"I am faithful to Rāma, my husband, the equal of great Indra, unshakable as a great mountain, imperturbable as the great sea.

"I am faithful to Rāma, the great-armed, great-chested prince, who moves with the boldness of a lion, a lionlike man, a lion among men.

"I am faithful to Rāma, the king's most cherished son, a great-armed, mighty prince of wide renown and strict self-control, whose face is like the full moon.

"As for you, you are a jackal in the presence of a lioness, to come here seeking me, whom you can never have. You could no more touch me than touch the radiance of the sun.

"You must be seeing many a golden tree of death, ill-fated Rāvaṇa, if you seek to gain the beloved wife of Rāghava.

"You are seeking to pluck the fang from the mouth of a poisonous snake, the tooth from the mouth of a hungry lion in pursuit, the foe to all beasts.

"You are seeking to carry off Mandara, greatest of mountains, in your hand, to drink the *kālakūṭa* poison and take no harm of it.²

"You are rubbing your eye with a needle, licking a razor with your tongue, if you seek to violate the beloved wife of Rāghava.

"You are seeking to cross the ocean with a boulder tied around your neck, to take into your hands the very sun and moon, if you seek to assault the beloved wife of Rāghava.

"You have seen a blazing fire and seek to carry it away in a cloth, if you seek to carry off the virtuous wife of Rāma.

"You are seeking to walk atop a row of iron-headed spears, if you seek to violate the proper wife of Rāma.

"As different as a lion and a jackal in the forest, the ocean and a ditch, rare wine and gruel, so different are Dāśarathi and you.

"As different as gold and lead, sandalwood paste and slime, a bull elephant and a cat in the forest, so different are Dāśarathi³ and you.

"As different as Garuda, the son of Vinatā,⁴ and a crow, a peacock and a gull, a vulture and a crane in the forest, so different are Dāśarathi and you.

"As long as Rāma walks the earth, mighty as thousand-eyed Indra, armed with his bow and arrow, you may take me but could never enjoy me, no more than a fly the diamond chip it swallows."

Such were the words the good woman addressed to the evil nightstalker, but a shudder passed through her body, and she began to quiver like a slender plantain tree tossed by the wind.

And when Rāvaṇa, mighty as Death himself, observed how Sītā was trembling, he thought to frighten her still further by telling of his House, his power, the name he had won for himself, and the deeds he had done.

poison, which Shiva swallowed to protect the world
the "descendent of Dasharatha").
of the god Vishnu.

SARGA 46

Even as Sītā was speaking in this manner, Rāvaṇa flew into a passion, and knitting his brow into a frown he harshly replied:

"I am half brother to Vaiśravaṇa,⁵ lovely lady. My name is Rāvaṇa, if you please, the mighty ten-necked one.

"In fear of me the gods, *gandharvas*, *piśācas*, great birds, and serpents flee in terror, as all things born are put to flight by fear of Death.

"In connection with some issue between us Vaiśravaṇa, my half brother, and I came into conflict. In a rage I attacked and defeated him in battle.

"Tormented by fear of me he left his own prosperous realm and now dwells on Kailāsa, highest of mountains, with only men to convey him.

"For the aerial chariot that flies where one desires, the lovely Puṣpaka, once belonged to him. But I took it by force of arms, my beauty, and now ride upon it through the sky.

"At the mere sight of my face, Maithilī, once my anger has been provoked, the gods with Indra at their head flee in terror.

"In my presence the wind blows cautiously, and the sun's hot rays turn cold in fear.

"The leaves on the trees stop rustling, and the rivers slacken their current wherever I am, wherever I go.

"On the further shore of the ocean lies my lovely city, Laṅkā, grand as Indra's Amarāvati, thronged with dreaded *rākṣasas*.

"It is a lovely, dazzling city ringed by a white rampart, with gateways made of gold and towers of cat's-eye beryl.

"It is crowded with elephants, horses, and chariots, the sound of pipes resounds there, and its gardens are beautiful, filled with trees bearing any fruit one wants.

"Living there with me, proud princess Sītā, you shall forget what it was like to have been a mortal woman.

"Enjoying not only the pleasures mortals enjoy, lovely lady, but divine pleasures, too, you shall soon forget that short-lived mortal, Rāma.

"So meager is his power that King Daśaratha, in order to enthrone a favored son, was able to drive him into the forest, first-born though he was.

"What use is this witless Rāma to you, large-eyed woman, a miserable ascetic who lets himself be deposed from the kingship?"

"The lord of all *rākṣasas* has come here in person, of his own accord. Do not reject him, whom the arrows of Manmatha, god of love, have so badly wounded.

"For if you do reject me, timid lady, you shall live to regret it, just like Urvaśī after she spurned Purūravas."⁶

So he spoke, but Vaidehī was overcome with rage—her eyes grew red, and though all alone in that deserted spot, she made this harsh reply to the lord of *rākṣasas*:

"How can you want to commit such an outrage, you who claim Vaiśravaṇa as brother, a god to whom all beings pay homage?"

"The *rākṣasas* shall inevitably perish, Rāvaṇa, all who have you for their king, a cruel, imprudent, intemperate king.

"A man might abduct Indra's wife, ūcī herself, and still hope to save his life, but he who carries me off, the wife of Rāma, has no life left to save.

"One might steal the incomparable ūcī from the hand that wields the thunderbolt and long remain alive. But violate a woman like me, *rākṣasa*, and even drinking the nectar of immortality will be no escape for you."

SARGA 47

Hearing Sītā's words the awesome ten-necked Rāvaṇa struck his hands together and made ready to assume his massive form.

Again he addressed Maithilī, and far more severely than before: "It seems you did not hear, madwoman, when I spoke of my strength and valor.

"I can lift the earth in my arms while standing in the sky; I can drink up the ocean, I can slay Death in battle.

"I can shatter the earth with my sharp arrows, madwoman, or bring the sun to a halt. I can take on any form at will. You see before you a husband ready to grant your every wish."

And as Rāvaṇa spoke thus in his wild rage, his yellow-rimmed eyes turned fiery red.

Then suddenly Rāvaṇa, younger brother to Vaiśravaṇa, abandoned the kindly form of beggar and assumed his true shape, one such as Doom itself must have.

With eyes flaming bright red, with earrings of burnished gold, with bow and arrows, he became once more the majestic ten-faced stalker of the night.

He had thrown off the guise of mendicant and assumed his own form again, the colossal shape of Rāvaṇa, overlord of *rākṣasas*.

With eyes flaming bright red in his rage, lowering like a bank of storm clouds, clad in a red garment Rāvaṇa stood before Maithilī, staring at her, perfect jewel of a woman, with her jet-black hair, her sunlike radiance, and the fine clothes and ornaments that she wore. And he said:

"If you seek a husband whose fame has spread throughout the three worlds, shapely woman, be mine. I am a lord worthy of you.

"Love me forever. I shall be a lover to win your praise, and never, my beauty, will I do anything to displease you. Give up this love for a mortal being, and bestow your love on me.

"What possible virtues could make you love this short-lived Rāma, a failure, stripped of kingship? You think you are so smart, but what a fool you really are!

"He is a simpleton, who at the bidding of a woman abandoned his kingdom and loved ones to come and live in this forest, the haunt of wild beasts."

And so speaking to Sītā, princess of Mithilā, who deserved the same kindness she always showed others, Rāvaṇa seized her as the planet Budha might seize the star Rohiṇī in the sky.

With his left hand he seized lotus-eyed Sītā by her hair and with his right hand by her thighs.

With his long arms and sharp fangs he resembled a mountain peak; seeing him advancing like Death himself, the spirits of the forest fled overpowered by fear.

Then with a dreadful rumble Rāvaṇa's great chariot came into view, that unearthly chariot fashioned by magic, with wheels of gold, and harnessed with asses.

With loud, harsh threats he then clutched Vaidehī to his breast and boarded the chariot.

Caught in Rāvaṇa's grip and wild with despair, the glorious Sītā screamed at the top of her voice, crying, "Rāma!" But Rāma was far away in the forest.

Filled with desire for one who was filled with loathing for him, Rāvaṇa flew up holding her writhing like a serpent queen.

As the lord of *rākṣasas* carried her off through the sky, she screamed shrilly like a woman gone mad, in agony, or delirious:

"Oh great-armed Lakṣmaṇa, you have always sought favor with your guru. Don't you know that I am being carried off by a *rākṣasa*, who can change his form at will?"

⁶ The celestial nymph Urvashi fell in love with the mortal king Pururavas. The reference here to her misfortune when she left Pururavas is unclear.

"And you, Rāghava, you renounced all life's pleasures, everything of value, for the sake of righteousness. Don't you see me being carried off in defiance of all that is right?"

"And surely, slayer of enemies, you are the one to discipline wrongdoers. Why then don't you punish so evil a creature as Rāvaṇa?"

"But no, the result of wrongdoing is not seen right away. Time is a factor in this, as in the ripening of grain.

"And as for you, Doom must have robbed you of your senses to do what you have done. Disaster shall befall you at the hands of Rāma, a terrible disaster that will end your life.

"Ah, now Kaikeyī and all her family must be satisfied. Rāma's lawful wife has been taken from him, that glorious prince whom nothing but righteousness could satisfy.

"Janasthāna, I call on you and you *karṇikāra* trees in full blossom: Tell Rāma at once that Rāvaṇa is carrying off Sītā.

"I greet you, Mount Prasravaṇa,⁷ with your flower garlands and massive peaks: Quickly tell Rāma that Rāvaṇa is carrying off Sītā.

"I greet you, Godāvarī river, alive with the call of geese and cranes: Tell Rāma at once that Rāvaṇa is carrying off Sītā.

"And you spirits that inhabit the different trees of this forest, I salute you all: Tell my husband that I have been carried off.

"All creatures that live in this place, I appeal to you for help, all you flocks of birds and herds of beasts: Tell my husband that the woman he loves more than life itself is being carried off, that Sītā has been carried away, helpless, by Rāvaṇa.

"Once the powerful, great-armed prince discovers where I am—albeit in the other world—he shall come in all his valor and bring me home, were it Vaivasvata himself, god of death, who had carried me off.

from Book 6¹

[THE DEATH OF RAVANA]

FROM SARGA 96

The great battle raged all night long as the gods, *dānavas*, *yakṣas*, *piśācas*, great serpents, and *rākṣasas* stood watching.

1. Translated by Robert Goldman, Barend A. van Nooten, and Sally Sutherland Goldman.

Indeed the duel between Rāma and Rāvaṇa went on day and night not pausing for an hour or even a moment.

SARGA 97

But then Mātali² alerted Rāghava, saying, "Why, heroic prince, do you merely match him blow for blow, as if you knew no better?"

"In order to kill him, my lord, you must shoot him with the missile of Grandfather Brahmā. For the moment ordained by the gods for his destruction is now at hand."

Alerted by Mātali's words, Rāma drew forth that blazing arrow which, as he did so, made a hissing sound like that of a snake.

It had been given to him earlier by the mighty and blessed seer Agastya. It was a mighty arrow, the gift of Brahmā and unfailing in battle.

Brahmā whose power is immeasurable had fashioned it long ago for the sake of Indra and had presented it to that lord of the gods, who was eager to conquer the three worlds.

Pavana, the god of the wind, resided in its feathers; Pāvaka, the god of fire, and Bhāskara, the sun god, were in its arrowhead. Its shaft was made of cosmic space; and the mountains Meru and Mandara lent it their weight.

Radiant in its appearance, beautifully feathered, and adorned with gold, it was fashioned with the radiant energy of all the elements, and it was as brilliant as the sun.

It looked like the smoking fire of doom and glistened like a venomous snake. It could shatter hosts of chariots, elephants, and horses; and its effects were instantaneous.

It could shatter gateways and their iron beams and even mountains. With its shaft drenched with the blood of various creatures and smeared with their marrow it was truly frightful.

Roaring deafeningly and charged with the power of the thunderbolt, it was the scourge of many hosts. Dreadful, hissing like a serpent, it inspired terror in all beings.

It was fearsome and looked like Yama, the god of death. It provided a constant supply of food to flocks of cranes and vultures, *rākṣasas*, and packs of jackals.

Fledged with the various, beautiful and variegated feathers of Garuḍa, it brought joy to the monkey chiefs and despair to the *rākṣasas*.

Then strong and mighty Rāma invoked that great, unequalled arrow—an arrow that robbed one's enemies of their glory but brought joy to oneself. It was destined to

2. As Ravana fought from a chariot while Rama was on foot, Indra, king of the gods, dispatched his chariot to provide Rama with a comparable conveyance.

destroy that menace to the Ikṣvākus³ and all the worlds; and Rāma placed it on his bow in the manner prescribed in the *veda*.

Filled with fury and exerting himself to the utmost, he bent the bow fully and loosed the arrow towards Rāvaṇa, tearing at his vitals.

As unstoppable as the thunderbolt and released by those arms of adamant, it struck Rāvaṇa's breast, inevitable as death.

Loosed with tremendous speed the deadly arrow pierced evil-minded Rāvaṇa's heart.

Drenched with blood the fatal arrow swiftly entered the earth, carrying with it the life breaths of Rāvaṇa.

Once the arrow had accomplished its purpose in killing Rāvaṇa, it obediently returned to its quiver, glistening with its still-wet blood.

Meanwhile the bow and arrows of him who had been struck down so swiftly slipped from his grasp along with his life breaths as he lay dying.

The lord of the sons of chaos, once so swift and splendid, fell lifeless to the ground from his chariot like Vṛtra⁴ smitten by the thunderbolt.

Seeing him fallen to the ground, the surviving rangers of the night, their lord slain, fled terrified in all directions.

But as for the monkeys, whose weapons were trees, when they saw that ten-necked Rāvaṇa had been slain and that Rāghava was victorious, they pursued the *rākṣasas*, roaring loudly.

Hard pressed by the jubilant monkeys, their protector slain, the *rākṣasas* fled in fear to Laṅkā, their piteous faces drenched with tears.

Then the rejoicing monkeys, acting the part of victors, roared triumphantly, proclaiming Rāghava's victory and the death of Rāvaṇa.

The auspicious kettledrums of the thirty gods then resounded in the heavens; and a pleasant breeze blew, wafting a divine fragrance.

Then an extraordinary and delightful shower of blossoms fell from the sky to the earth, covering Rāma's chariot.

The beautiful voice of the great gods filled with the praise of Rāghava could be heard in the heavens crying, "Well done! Well done!"

4. A demon slain by Indra, who as the god of rain wields a thunderbolt.

dynasty of Ayodhya.

Now that fierce Rāvaṇa, the terror of all the worlds, had been slain, great joy filled the gods and celestial bards.

Then, having slain that bull among *rākṣasas*, Rāghava, in great delight, fulfilled the wishes of Sugrīva and mighty Aṅgada.⁵

The hosts of the Māruts⁶ regained tranquility, the directions were limpid, and the sky grew clear. The earth ceased its trembling, and soft breezes blew, while the sun, the bringer of day, shone with a steady light.

Sugrīva, Vibhīṣaṇa,⁷ and the rest of splendid Rāghava's close allies, together with Lakṣmaṇa, gathered around him on the battlefield in the joy of victory and paid him homage with all due ceremony.

And the mighty prince, the delight of the king of the Raghu dynasty, having slain his enemy, became true to his vow. Surrounded by his kinsmen and armies there on the field of battle, he looked as resplendent as Indra surrounded by the hosts of the thirty gods.

[After the killing of Rāvaṇa, Sītā is recovered and brought before Rāma.]

[THE FIRE ORDEAL OF SITA]

SARGA 103

Looking at Maithilī who stood so meekly beside him, Rāma began to speak as rage simmered in his heart.

"So here you are, my lady. I have won you back after conquering my enemy in battle. I did all this in accordance with the demands of manly valor.

"I have wiped clean the affront and so my wrath is appeased. For I have eliminated both the insult and my enemy at the same time.

"Today I have demonstrated my manly valor. Today my efforts have borne fruit. Today, having fulfilled my vow, I am once more master of myself.

"You were carried off by that wanton *rākṣasa* when you were left alone, but now through manly action I have expunged that affront caused by fate.

"Of what use to anyone is a weakling who cannot wipe clean an insult through his own power?

"The leaping of the ocean and the razing of Laṅkā—today those praiseworthy deeds of Hanumān have borne fruit.

5. Sugrīva is the monkey king of Kishkindha who aided Rāma in the recovery of Sita. Aṅgada is his nephew and successor.

6. The wind gods.

7. The virtuous rākṣasa.

"And today the efforts of Sugrīva and his army through their valor in battle and their beneficial counsel to me have borne fruit as well.

"And the efforts of my devoted Vibhīṣaṇa, who abandoned his worthless brother and came to me of his own accord, have likewise borne fruit."

Now as Rāma was saying these words in this fashion, Sītā, who looked like a wide-eyed doe, was overcome with tears.

But as Rāma gazed upon her, his anger flared up once more, like a blazing fire drenched with melted butter.

Knitting his brows on his forehead and glancing at her from the corner of his eye, he spoke harshly to Sītā there in the midst of the monkeys and *rākṣasas*.

"In wiping away this affront, Sītā, I have accomplished all that a man could do. In my wrath, I have won you back from the hands of my enemy just as through his austerities, the contemplative sage Agastya won back the southern lands that had been inaccessible to all living beings.

"Please understand that I did not undertake this great war effort—now brought to completion through the valor of my allies—on your account. Instead I did all this in order to protect my reputation and in every way to wipe clean the insult and disgrace to my illustrious lineage.

"Since, however, your virtue is now in doubt, your presence has become as unbearable to me as a bright lamp to a man afflicted with a disease of the eye.

"Go, therefore, as you please with my permission, daughter of Janaka, in any of the ten directions. I have no further use for you, my lady.

"For what powerful man born in a respectable family—his heart tinged with affection—would take back a woman who had lived in the house of another man?

"How could I who boast of my noble lineage possibly take you back—just risen from Rāvaṇa's lap and gazed upon by his lustful eye?

"I have restored my reputation; and that is the purpose for which I won you back. I have no further interest in you. Go from here wherever you like.

"I have made up mind in saying this, my lady. Choose Lakṣmaṇa or Bharata as you please.

"Or, Sītā, turn your heart to Sugrīva, lord of the monkeys, or the *rākṣasa* lord Vibhīṣaṇa, whichever pleases you.

"For surely, Sītā, once he had seen you with your heavenly beauty so enchanting, he would not long have left you unmolested while you were dwelling in his

When Maithilī, who deserved to hear only kind words, had heard those cruel words of her beloved after so long a time, she shed tears and trembled violently like a *vallarī* creeper struck down by the trunk of a mighty elephant.

SARGA 104

When Vaidehī was addressed in this cruel and horrifying manner by the furious Rāghava, she was deeply wounded.

Hearing those cutting words of her husband before that great multitude, words such as she had never heard before, Maithilī was overcome with shame.

Pierced, as it were, by those verbal barbs, the daughter of Janaka, seemed to shrink within herself and gave way to bitter tears.

Wiping her tear-stained face, she replied softly to her husband in a faltering voice:

"How can you, heroic prince, speak to me with such cutting and improper words, painful to the ears, as some vulgar man might speak to his vulgar wife?

"I am not as you think of me, great armed prince. You must believe in me, for I swear to you by my own virtue.

"You harbor suspicion against all women because of the conduct of the vulgar ones. If you really knew me, you would abandon your suspicion.

"If I touched another's body against my will, lord, it was not by my choice. It is fate that was to blame here.

"My heart, which I control, was always devoted to you. But I was helpless. What could I have done regarding my body, which was in the power of another?

"If, my love, you do not truly know me despite our long-nurtured love and intimacy, then surely I am lost forever.

"When you dispatched the heroic Hanumān to search for me, why, heroic prince, did you not repudiate me then, while I was still in Laṅkā?

"No sooner had I heard your message, heroic prince, then abandoned by you, I would have abandoned my own life right before the eyes of that monkey lord.

"Then you would not have had to risk your life in a useless effort nor would your allies have had to undergo hardships to no purpose.

"But now, tiger among men, you give way to anger like some lesser man, thinking of me only as a typical woman.

"Since I am named after Janaka, you fail to take into account that I was born from the Goddess Earth, nor, though you know my conduct well, do you give it proper consideration.

"You give no weight to the fact that you took my hand when we were both still children. My devotion, my virtuous conduct—all that you have set aside."

When she had spoken in this fashion, Sītā turned weeping to Lakṣmaṇa, who stood there despondent and brooding, and spoke, her voice choked with tears.

"Build me a pyre, Saumitri, the only cure for this calamity. I cannot bear to live under the cloud of this false allegation.

"Rejected in the assembly of the people by my husband, who is not satisfied with my virtues, I shall enter the fire, bearer of oblations, so that I may follow the only path proper for me."

When Lakṣmaṇa, slayer of heroic foes, had been addressed in this fashion by Vaidehī, he glared at Rāghava's face, gripped by indignation.

But, sensing Rāma's intentions, which were betrayed by his facial expression, mighty Saumitri, ever obedient to Rāma's wishes, built the pyre.

Then reverently circumambulating Rāma, who stood with his face downcast, Vaidehī approached the blazing fire, eater of oblations.

After making her obeisance to the gods and the brahmins, Maithilī cupped her hands in reverence and facing Agni, god of fire, said this:

"Since my heart has never once strayed from Rāghava, so may the purifying fire, witness of all the world, protect me in every way."

When she had spoken in this fashion, Vaidehī reverently circumambulated the fire, eater of oblations. Then she entered the blazing flames, with a fearless heart.

The vast crowd assembled there, filled with children and the aged, watched as Maithilī entered the fire, eater of oblations.

As Sītā entered the fire, a vast and prodigious cry of, "Alas! Alas!" arose from the *rākṣasas* and monkeys.

[The gods appear to ask how Rāma, who is chief among the gods, could remain unmoved as Sītā throws herself into the fire. Led by Brahmā they then remind Rāma of his divinity and utter a hymn of praise to him.]

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Upon hearing that auspicious speech uttered by Grandfather Brahmā, the shining god of fire took Vaidehī on his lap and rose.

She resembled the rising sun and was adorned with ornaments of burnished gold. She was young and wore red garments and her hair was dark and curling. Her

garland and ornaments were undamaged. Her mind was calm and her appearance unchanged. Taking Vaidehī on his lap the shining god of fire presented her to Rāma.

Then the purifying god of fire, witness of all the world, spoke to Rāma, saying, "Here is your Vaidehī, Rāma. She has committed no sin.

"She is of pure conduct and high moral character and has never betrayed you in word, thought, imagination, or glance.

"When you had left her alone she was carried off, helpless and sorrowful, from the deserted forest by the *rākṣasa* Rāvaṇa, arrogant in his power.

"Hidden and imprisoned in the inner apartments, thinking only of you and having you for her only recourse, she was guarded by hordes of hideous *rākṣasa* women, dreadful to behold.

"Although she was enticed and threatened in various ways, Maithilī would not even think of the *rākṣasa*, since her heart was utterly devoted to you.

"You must take her back, Rāghava, for her heart is pure and she is free from sin. Say no more, I am giving you an order."

When mighty Rāma, steadfast and firm in his valor, had been addressed in this fashion, that best of those who maintain righteousness, replied to that foremost among the thirty gods.

"Unquestionably Sītā needed to be proven innocent before the three worlds, since the auspicious woman had long dwelt in Rāvaṇa's inner apartments.

"For had I not put Jānakī to the test, the virtuous would say of me, 'Daśaratha's son Rāma is a lustful fool.'

"I know full well that Janaka's daughter Maithilī could give her heart to no other, since she is devoted to me and obeys my every thought.

"But in order that the three worlds too should have faith in her, I, whose ultimate recourse is truth, took no notice as Vaidehī entered the fire, eater of oblations.

"Rāvaṇa could no more have violated that wide-eyed lady, protected by her own blazing energy, than could the mighty ocean violate its boundary.

"That evil-minded brute was incapable of assaulting Maithilī even in his thoughts. For she is as unapproachable as a blazing flame of fire.

"This auspicious woman was not destined to rule over Rāvaṇa's inner apartments. For she is as inseparable from me as is its radiance from the sun.

"Janaka's daughter Maithilī has been proven innocent before the three worlds, and I am no more able to give her up than is a self-controlled man his good reputation.