

Chapter 8. The Siege

When Rama heard from Angada what had happened at Lanka and learned 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 demons (Vibhishana) met together; they decided on the division of their forces into four, under commanders and guides; then, they fell at Rama's feet and, enthused by his blessings, gave orders for attack.

With Rama in their hearts and armed with boulders and trees, the monkeys rolled forward in terror-striking floods. Lanka was reputedly impregnable, but Rama's blessings 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 monkeys 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 reveling in the thought that the festive day of victory had dawned for the demon (*rakshasa*) sun.

The demons had taken up positions over walls and turrets and bastions of the fort, just like 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 demons were hurling on the monkeys, who were attempting to scale the walls, were seized before they fell by the monkeys and hurled back with fatal effect on the very demons crowding the walls. The advance of the monkeys gained in momentum as the fight progressed. They killed the demons wherever and whenever they caught them. As a giant storm scatters clouds into the four directions, the mounting onslaught of the monkeys so dismayed the demons 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 demons 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'll cut you into pieces with my diamond sword!"

At this, a few of the fleeing demon stayed in the fray. Meanwhile, the monkey heroes penetrated the enemy lines and, reinforced by their contemplation on Rama, 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 demon 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 monkeys, after demonstrating their superior might and heroism before the demon, presented themselves before Rama.

The demons (*rakshasas*) are nocturnal beings, so when night fell, their acclamation and fury increased many-fold. Their shouts of "Victory to Ravana" fell on the ears of the monkeys like the roar of lions. The monkeys plunged into battle again. The demon generals Akampa and Atikaya, through their magical skill, spread pitch darkness over the four quarters, and, under cover of the blackness, heavy rains of dust, stones and blood were

poured on the enemy forces. The monkeys couldn't distinguish friend from foe. They were afraid to fight with full fury. They prayed, "Rama! Rama," in a loud voice to gain courage and give the enemy a good fight.

Rama heard their cries; he called Angada and Hanuman and told them that the demons' magic skill had caused the commotion. They were furious at the shameful tactics of the enemy, but Rama coolly pulled out the fire-arrow (*agneyastra*) 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 monkeys 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 demons took to their heels and fled. But they could not escape; the monkeys caught them by their feet and threw them far out into the sea! The demons retreated into their camp when night advanced. They had no energy left for continuing the fight. The monkeys came into Rama's presence. When Rama's eyes fell upon them, they were all refreshed and recouped, with no trace of exhaustion.

Malyavantha pleads, Meghanada mollifies

Meanwhile, Ravana summoned his ministers and addressed them. "This day, thousands of demons were slain on the battlefield by the monkeys. Now we have to plan our strategy to foil them."

Up rose Malyavantha, the aged minister who was the father of Ravana's mother and who had served Ravana's father. He counseled various rightful and moral paths for his edification. "Ravana!", he began, very endearingly, "Listen to my words in calmness. Pardon me for speaking outright. Ever since you brought Sita here, bad omens are being 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 Hero, 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. Don't entertain hatred against Him. O Emperor! Save Lanka, I pray. Surrender Sita to Rama. Don't delay any longer. Your safety lies in immediate surrender." 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 get out of my sight." He 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 reasonings and foolish reactions, brushing aside the advice that would save him and his empire, because destiny had decided to close his career.

Meghanada rose and said, "Father, don't 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 appetite for food. All were sunk in anxiety and terror about the calamity that might overtake them any moment.

Meghanada leads the fight

Even as they were rolling in fear, dawn spread over the east. The monkeys and the bears laid siege to Lanka from all directions. Confusion and panic raised their heads. Their roars echoed from the sky. The demon warriors had to take up arms and oppose them, for 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 demons. They too shouted and yelled, reverberating the sky as on doomsday. But the huge peaks and hilltops that the monkeys threw at them reduced the demon hordes into a mass of lifeless pulp.

Enraged at the news that the monkeys 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 monkeys lost courage when they saw him on his chariot. Seeing the flight of the enemy forces, Meghanada shouted in joy. 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. The monkeys 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 monkeys, Hanuman was overcome with rage; he hastened toward Meghanada, full of fury and appearing as the God of death Himself! He plucked a mountain peak that was nearby and threw it at the demon leader.

When he saw the peak rushing toward 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 couldn't see his own palm spread before his eyes. The monkeys were confused and rendered despondent by such tactics. They felt that their end had come.

Rama saw the tricks into which the demons, in their despair, had descended; he laughed within himself at their helplessness. He became aware that the monkeys had lost confidence and courage, so he shot one single arrow into the fray. The magic of the demon was mortally hit, and it no longer worked. Brightness was restored to the earth, as if the Sun had risen in the sky.

The monkeys recovered self-confidence and advanced toward the demon ranks. Rama's compassionate glance fell upon them, and they were refreshed. The entire monkey horde shouted with one voice, "Victory (*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, so he hastened to send strong reinforcements to support his son on the field.

The monkeys fought without respite, armed with tree and rocks. Both sides fought ferociously with unabated

fury. Most of the fight centred around duels between warriors and leaders. The monkeys hit with their clenched fists and bit with their sharp teeth, causing the death of a vast number of demons. With their nails, they clipped 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 monkeys announced their triumph resounded among the Nine Islands. Headless corpses of the demons continued to run along the directions taken by the demons while alive; seeing this eerie phenomenon, the monkeys broke into ribald laughter. The roads that criss-crossed over the vast field of battle were filled with streams of blood.

Lakshmana is hurt!

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 war tactics. But even these were foiled, and his plans ended in failure. Lakshmana, in a spurt of terrific rage, destroyed Meghanada's chariot and killed his charioteer. Afraid that his death was imminent, Meghanada took in hand the supremely potent weapon, Sakthi, which Brahma had given him. Aiming it at the very heart of Lakshmana, he directed it to the target. The weapon hit Lakshmana's heart, coming straight from Meghanada's hand. Lakshmana fell on the ground in a "mortal" swoon.

No longer in fear, Meghanada 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 Adishesha, which bears the cosmos on its thousand hoods, come again. How could anyone, however strong, or any number of such ones succeed in lifting him? Only those who have won Sri Rama's grace could move Lakshmana!

Meanwhile, the shades of evening invaded the land. The two opposing forces returned to their camps. Sri Rama saw the returning monkeys but could not see Lakshmana. He asked, "Where is Lakshmana?" Just at that moment, Hanuman entered carrying Lakshmana's body over his shoulder. Hanuman was praying plaintively, "Rama! Rama!"

Rama acted perturbed and affected by anxiety, but he soon righted himself. He laid Lakshmana's body on his lap and examined it carefully for a long time. Jambavan, the aged, spoke at that juncture. "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 to Rama's camp, so he resorted to a ruse. He lifted Sushena's house 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 Rama's feet and disclosed the name of the mountain where the drug that 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 given the task. Rama entrusted the task to him.

Kalanemi tries to dissuade Ravana

Meanwhile, one of his spies reported to Ravana that Sushena, the physician, had reached Rama's presence.

Ravana consulted Kalanemi on this new development and its consequences. Kalanemi replied, “Ravana! This Hanuman is an impossible person! Didn’t he set Lanka in flames even when you were looking on? What special skill or strength do I have to conquer him? The time to do the right thing is still not past. Give up the absurd notion that it is possible for you to win victory over Rama. Go; take refuge at Rama’s feet. Your fortunes will get better thereby. Forsake your pride and obstinacy.”

Kalanemi gave Ravana good counsel; but Ravana was looking for something different, so Ravana condemned him. Shaking with rage, he shouted. “Are you prepared to obey me? If not, prepare yourself for death.”

Hanuman kills Kalanemi

Kalanemi thought that it would be much more beneficial to die at Rama’s hands than be 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 sage (*rishi*), he sat in deep meditation on its bank.

Hanuman, who was on his way to the mountain range to get the life-saving drug, was exhausted, since he had had no rest after the fierce engagement with Meghanada. So 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 sage, who was reciting Rama’s name and extolling his exploits and excellences. He was delighted; he too sang the name “Rama! Rama!”

The disguised Kalanemi told him, “O monkey! A war is 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.”

Hanuman was elated. He told the sage that he was thirsty. The sage told him that his water vessel had cool refreshing water and offered it to him. Hanuman said, “Master! This little quantity cannot quench my thirst to any appreciable degree.” Then the sage 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 went to the lake indicated. He walked 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, for 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?”

The person answered, “O 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 Indra’s court 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 demons (*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, in the last quarter of the *Thretha* Age. The Lord will be incarnating as Rama, and a terrible battle will ensue between Rama and the ruler of Lanka. During the battle, Lakshmana, Rama’s brother, will get fatally hurt by the weapon called Sakthi, and Hanuman, a devoted servant of Rama, will journey to Sanjivi Mountain, green with bushes of drugs; you will both be liberated from the demon encumbrance by contact with him.’ O monkey! The sage (*rishi*) who lives nearby, who directed you here, is no sage at all. He is a demon 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.”

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 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 toward the Drona mountain range. Reaching Sanjivi Hill, he 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, and he was conscious of the urgency of Rama’s command. So he resorted to another plan. He plucked the entire hill and leapt through the sky carrying it on his palm.

Hanuman encounters Bharatha

Hanuman had to pass over the city of Ayodhya on his way to Lanka at night. At this time, Bharatha was 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 demon (*rakshasa*) that had assumed that form while 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!”

Bharatha stood up, shocked, and ran toward the fallen monkey. From Hanuman he learned the story of his mission and the urgency of his errand. He was overcome with grief, but 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 monkey 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 Bharatha’s sincerity. 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, “O 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.

Hanuman told 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 Bharatha’s feet and raised aloft the hill on his palm. When he took off and flew into the horizon, Bharatha watched him with unblinking eyes until he disappeared from view. He was glad that at last he

had some knowledge of Rama's movements, 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, Lakshmana's mother, though saddened for awhile, quickly recovered her composure, reminding herself that Rama was at her son's side. 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 Lakshmana's fate; this 'loss of consciousness' must be affecting him; separation from his brother might cause him grief. Son! Satrugna! Go to Rama and be by his side."

Satrugna 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 can't agree to your joining him." Bharatha comforted Satrugna and told him that Rama might dislike this act, and that it was always beneficial to bow to his will.

Rama cares for Lakshmana

Meanwhile, in Lanka, Rama was guarding Lakshmana. The day rolled into evening and night and even into midnight. The monkeys were squatting around Rama. Rama, acting as merely human, expressed anxiety at Hanuman's non-arrival. "It's midnight, but there is no sign of Hanuman yet! Has he lost his way by any chance? Lakshmana is still critically unconscious!"

He turned Lakshmana's face tenderly toward himself 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 toward me. Without even a blink 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 a common mortal.

"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 wouldn't take food at meal time, 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 have been deprived of loving care, don't you realise this? Lakshmana! Open your eyes just once and look upon me; that is what I most need now."

Rama held Lakshmana's chin in his loving hand and prayed most touchingly for one glance from his eye. The monkeys shed tears of sorrow at the anguish that Rama experienced. Many of them climbed the hill-top trees and peered into the distance to discover signs of Hanuman's approach.

Lakshmana recovers

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 monkeys.

The monkeys 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's death 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 *Sauvarnakarini* and the *Sanjivakarini*—from the peak and administered them to Lakshmana. And Lakshmana sat up, fully awake.

Rama was overcome with joy. He embraced his brother and caressed him very fondly, exclaiming, “Brother! Brother! Where had you been all these hours?” His eyes streamed with tears of joy and gratitude. He was plunged in high delight, comparable only to *Brahmic* Bliss.

Meanwhile, as a result of contact with the vitalising air that blew from the Sanjivi Peak into their midst, the monkeys 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 monkeys, who danced in glee, embracing their revived companions and kinfolk.

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 monkeys. Hanuman praised Sushana's 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.

Demon generals are killed

Another day dawned. War drums could be heard from the demon camp. The monkeys 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 general was Dhumraksha. He fought desperately, but he was killed the next day by Hanuman.

Akampa stepped into the breach and fought ferociously at the head of the demonic horde. Angada led the monkeys against Akampa, and he was able to kill the demon general that very day.

Hearing that Akampa had died at the hands of the enemy, Prahastha rushed into the battlefield, raising great hue and cry. Nila took him on and, remembering ever more keenly the name of Rama, 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 demons. 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 demons of Lanka were stricken with panic. They struggled to hide themselves somewhere in order to save their lives. Many surrendered and sought refuge in the camp of monkeys. 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. the redoubtable warrior Makaraksha continued the battle. Lakshmana fought him and killed him. When such signal success was accomplished in a trice, the monkeys leaped in joy and shouted, “Victory! Victory! (*jai! jai!*)”

Kumbhakarna berates Ravana

Ravana wailed and wept when he heard that his unbeatable generals had all, one by one, fallen dead! He ran to where his brother Kumbhakarna lay asleep and tried to awaken him by urgent and drastic means. Vast crowds of demons gathered near his ears and beat huge drums wildly. Ravana brought hundreds of boxers to hit the sleeping demon; hundreds rained punches on him; many dealt heavy thrusts on his thighs, with gigantic maces. At last, his 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 Kumbhakarna rise in red vengeance, as if he was the very embodiment of time, the universal destroyer. He exclaimed, “Fool! Can you ever achieve victory? 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, 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 this calamity on your head by the mischief of your own hands.”

Kumbhakarna laid the blame on his own brother and advised him for a long time, but Ravana was in no mood to accept the blame. “Don’t desert me in disaster. Prepare yourself to lead our armies into the war; save my life,” he pleaded.

The demon brothers meet

Finding no means of escape, and overcome by affection for the brother, Kumbhakarna got ready. They placed cauldrons of liquor and mounds of meat before him, so that he might breakfast on them. Gulping the whole lot in a moment, Kumbhakarna went 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 counseled him in various ways. He discarded my advice and gave ear to power-mad foolish ministers; he hurled unbearable abuses on me, within hearing of those people. 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.”

Kumbhakarna replied, “Well, brother! The shadow of death is already on Ravana, so how 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 demon 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 to confine yourself to loyalty to Rama.”

Receiving this advice and the blessings of his brother, Vibhishana returned to Rama’s presence. He told Rama, “Lord! That mountain of a demon (*rakshasa*) is Kumbhakarna; he is a ferociously brave fighter. He has come to engage you in battle.”

Kumbhakarna attains liberation

When the monkeys heard these words, they were so angry that they spouted fire and leaped under Hanuman’s leadership on the enemy forces. They threw huge trees and enormous boulders at him. But Kumbhakarna stood firm and unaffected. The monkey 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. Recovering soon he returned the blow and felled him to the ground. Nala and Nila joined the fight, but they also couldn’t withstand the might of Kumbhakarna. Fear seized the monkey 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 off the king, he had vanquished the monkey army.

Hanuman regained awareness of the state of things. He found Sugriva was not around, and he got anxious to discover his whereabouts. While being carried away, pressed under the mighty Kumbhakarna’s arm, Sugriva recovered consciousness and tried his best to wriggle out of the hold. Hanuman found him engaged in this desperate bid and ran to help him.

However, Sugriva separated himself from his captor and started a valiant fight against him. He bit off Kumbhakarna’s nose and ears, making it extremely difficult for the monster to breathe. Soon, a horde of monkeys yelling “Victory to Rama” “Victory to our Master,” surrounded Kumbhakarna and rained rocks, hills and trees on him. The infuriated demon leaped on the monkeys. Catching whoever he could lay his hands on, he crunched them and swallowed them. Many were crushed to death. Thus, Kumbhakarna was able to scatter the monkeys in panic.

At this, Rama told Lakshmana and others that the time had come for himself, Rama, to enter the fray; his intercession could be delayed no longer. “Lakshmana! Bring that ‘inexhaustible’ arrow-sheath here,” he said. Bearing the command of Rama on his head, he immediately brought the sheath and placed it in his brother’s hands.

Armed with the Kodanda Bow, Rama walked into the battle area, like a lion toward 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 demons 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 demon forces, Kumbhakarna was terribly enraged; he roared

like a wounded lion and jumped into the midst of the fray. The monkeys 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 toward 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 didn't 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; to prevent this movement, Rama shot another arrow, which cut it in two.

Suddenly, a splendour arose from the body and, advancing toward Rama, merged in him. The demon attained liberation without performing any spiritual practice (*sadhana*) or recitation of the name or austerity for sense control and mind control (*tapas*). 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 fight. They retired to their camps. The grace bestowed by Rama reinforced the spirits of the monkeys. Like fire fed by dry grass, the flame of their ardour rose high.

Meghanada tries to trick the monkey hordes

The demons lost strength, night and day. Ravana wailed inconsolably. He was a cobra that had lost its crest-jewel. Pressing his brother's severed head to his bosom, he wept aloud. Meghanada tried to soothe him in various ways; "Tomorrow I shall demonstrate before you my heroic might. I shall, in a trice, smash this monkey 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 demons into the struggle; they marched forth to meet the enemy. Each fought with whomever 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, and the roar felled the monkeys, 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. Accosting him, Meghanada shouted, "Listen, Hanuman! This Sita, to recover whom you are waging this war, I am going killing her right now. Look. With her death, this war must end." Drawing his sword, he cut her to pieces and cast them away.

Hanuman was plunged in vengeful rage; he called upon the monkeys to fight on, with no thought of survival, and exterminate the demon brood. The monkeys attacked them so ferociously that the demons fell back into the city.

Hanuman reported to Rama the wicked deed performed by Meghanada. Rama pretended to be affected by the news, although he knew that it was a pseudo-Sita contrived through the magic skill of the demons. Still, he acted as though he was just a "man among men". Lakshmana 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 Rama and said, “Master! You know the truth of this. The entire incident is a fake. Sita is alive and guarded with great care. Only Ravana has access to the place where she is kept under guard. Meghanada designed a ‘Sita’ and killed her in order to deceive us into despair. Among us demons, 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 demons. In order to confirm Vibhishana’s statement and to satisfy himself all the more, Hanuman assumed another form, entered Lanka City unnoticed by anyone, and went to the park where Sita was kept under guard. Upon returning, he assured the monkeys that all was well. This urged the monkeys to greater enthusiasm in battle.

Meghanada is defeated

Meghanada returned to the battle. This time, he rained on the monkeys not only sharp arrows but spears, maces, axes, pestles, and boulders. The monkeys heard terror-striking shouts and commands reverberating all around them —“Beat,” “Hold,” etc.— but they couldn’t see who was 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 where the danger came from 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 and showered hissing serpent-arrows on Rama. It was the renowned dragon weapon, the Sarpastra. And Rama, the Supreme Actor come in the human role, the mighty hero who destroyed Khara, Dushana, and their phalanxes, allowed himself to be bound by the effects of that powerful weapon! 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 monkeys were rendered helpless and worried, because Rama had been overpowered by the weapon of the dragon. Meghanada was overjoyed; he rushed among the monkeys, spouting vulgar abuse.

Jambavan saw him. “O you vicious worm! Stop,” he cried. Meghanada brushed him aside, saying, “Fie on you, I 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 demon circled round himself a few times and fell on the ground.

Jambavan rushed to him, held, swung him round very fast by his feet, and 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 didn’t die. He rose with great difficulty and moved away. He hadn’t fulfilled his boast, so he felt ashamed to show his face before his father. He went straight to a garden Nikumbala, where many demons had performed penance and endured austerities in the past.

Lakshmana kills Meghanada

Four of Vibhishana's courtiers who were watching the movements of the enemy leaders incognito came to know about this and 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 ritual (*yajna*) to propitiate evil powers. If he completes the ceremonials, 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 sacrifice (*yajna*) that Meghanada is observing." Turning to Lakshmana, he 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 said this than Vibhishana, Sugriva, and Hanuman—the three—collected a huge force of monkeys and followed Lakshmana in order to give him support. Lakshmana armed himself with the bow and the ever-full arrow-sheath. 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 Nikumbala Park, they found the sacrifice already on and the flesh and blood of buffaloes being offered in the ritual fire. So they started disturbing the ceremonies. However, Meghanada didn't desist, so they began to loudly caricature the hymns being uttered, but that didn't persuade the priests to stop the rituals either. So the infuriated monkeys rushed into the sacrificial area, caught Meghanada by the hair, pulled him to the ground, and kicked him.

Meghanada took hold of the trident and pounced upon them. Angada and Hanuman fell on him but 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 and hit Meghanada with all their strength. However, the demon didn't quail; he didn't 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.

Using his magic skill, Meghanada rendered himself invisible. He assumed many a mysterious role and escaped.

Lakshmana's patience ran out at last; he fixed sacred arrows on his bow and, invoking on it Rama's might and majesty, aimed it at Meghanada, wherever he might be. That arrow entered Meghanada's heart and ended his life. Since he had the image of Rama and Lakshmana in his mind during the last moments, 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.