

Chapter 10. Ten Heads Roll

When Ravana heard the news of this holocaust, he exclaimed, “Whoever expected the war to end thus? Who ever expected that it would be so calamitous a disaster?”

The news of Narantaka’s death spread terror throughout Lanka. Many wise scholars approached Ravana, the bereaved father, and sought to give him consolation and comfort. But their effort was just waste of time; their advice didn’t enter Ravana’s heads.

When Ravana recovered himself, he heard the wailings of Narantaka’s wife, and that made him angrier still. He forgot himself in the flames of vengeance and anger. The night ended and day dawned, although Ravana did not notice it. The monkeys gathered at the four gates of the city and were, as usual, getting ready to storm them and enter.

Ravana himself heads the army

Ravana assembled the demon (*rakshasa*) warriors and addressed them, “Soldiers! If your hearts shudder at the prospect of battle, it is best you leave the ranks this very instant. Don’t flee when the battle is on; if you do, I shall slaughter you with my own hands.” Threatening them thus, he felt they would fight to the last. Then, he ordered the war drums to be beaten and trumpets to be blown.

Like darkness intensifying mountain peaks, the demon warriors marched forward in serried ranks. A series of bad omens assaulted them, but Ravana, who boasted of his physical prowess, did not pay heed to them. The weapons he held in his grasp slithered down; the charioteer who had taken his seat fell from his perch. The elephants and horses marching forward to battle started wailing aloud. All around, dogs and foxes set up a cacophony of grief. Owls hooted ominously as if announcing the doom that loomed over Lanka.

The demon forces —cavalry, elephantry, and infantry— marched forward to meet the enemy at the gates. The earth exuded tremors when the forces trampled hard on it. The splendour of that army was indescribable. The army, led by Ravana, shone like the army that the god of spring leads every year, with all its colour, music, and joy. Drums, trumpets, bugles, and pipes played around in a majestic stream of heroism and adventure.

The monkeys and bears pounced on the demons and fell upon them, like a host of heavy mountains whose wings were clipped by the arrows of some strange power. They attacked them like the minions of death. Their most efficient weapons were teeth and nails. They threw hills and huge trees on the foe. By their leonine roar, “Victory to our Lord, Sri Rama,” they made the elephant hearts of the demons (*rakshasas*) shudder in mortal fear.

Very soon, the battle became a series of duels between the demons and the monkeys. The cry “victory to Rama” was met by the cry “victory to Ravana.” The demons fought like the emissaries of death; the monkeys bled from many wounds. They pounded the enemies heavily with their fists. They tore them to pieces with their teeth; they kicked them in the ribs with their feet. They held them in their grip and tore them apart. They pulled out their entrails and wore them round their necks.

Ravana saw the decimation of his army with alarm. He took up his bow and shot arrows at the soldiers of his army fleeing for life from the field of fury. The monkeys were inspired when they saw Ravana filled with anger at his own warriors. They yelled in joy and leaped toward him in large numbers. They aimed peaks and trees at him.

Ravana turned all round him and encouraged his soldiers to stand firm. The monkeys fled in all directions unable to meet the onrush. They wailed, “O Lord, Sugriva! Sugriva, save us, save us.”

Earth and sky were darkened by the showers of Ravana’s arrows. The monkeys ran to the far corners of the land. Chaos prevailed in the camp. Lakshmana noticed the situation; he girded up his loins and armed himself with his bow and sheaf of arrows. Prostrating before Sri Rama, he rose with his blessings and proceeded to the field of battle.

Lakshmana accosted Ravana and scoffed at him. “You villain! What benefit can you gain by slaughtering monkeys and bears? Gaze at me, standing before you like death itself, the spirit of time come to finish your earthly career.”

Ravana replied, “O! Don’t I know you? You are the destroyer of my son. I have been looking out for you for many days. My heart will find solace only on my killing you today.”

Ravana yelled in anger and let loose sharp arrows at Lakshmana. But Lakshmana cleverly cut them into a thousand splinters. In addition Lakshmana shot fiery shafts at Ravana and they succeeded in cutting Ravana’s chariot to pieces. Lakshmana rained arrows in deadly groups of a hundred and more. They found their mark on Ravana’s faces and on his chest, so that he was felled to the ground, consciousness with the blow and the pain.

Yet, he recovered very quickly. He rose up in ferocious anger and directed against Lakshmana the terrible mighty missile that was conferred on him by the first of the trinity, Brahma Himself. When the missile hit Lakshmana, he rolled to the ground.

Hanuman saw the fall, and he hastened to Lakshmana’s side, shouting imprecations against Ravana. Ravana administered a heavy blow on Hanuman with his clenched fist. It made Hanuman reel in pain, but he steadied himself. He returned the blow with an even more power-filled one. Ravana was stunned by the impact. He said within himself, “May this fellow’s fist be burned to ashes. I never dreamed that a monkey’s fist could discharge such a thunderbolt.”

Meanwhile, Lakshmana recovered from the swoon and rose, ready for the fray.

Ravana tries to hold a victory-ensuring ritual

Ravana had to be helped into another chariot, having become unconscious again. His charioteer cleverly drove the chariot in the direction of Lanka. Ravana got back his awareness as soon as he reached Lanka. He ordered that a special destruction-yielding, victory-ensuring ritual called *patalahoma* be performed so that he could defeat the enemy at his door.

What a big fool he was! Could he ever achieve victory in a fight with Rama? Those who were spying his activities on Vibhishana’s behalf carried the news of the *patalahoma* to him, and he was alerted in time. Vibhishana approached Rama without delay and, falling at his feet said, “Lord! Now Ravana is engaged in a ritual, the same one that Meghanada began in the past. This ceremony has also to be defiled and desecrated by the monkeys so that Ravana is deprived of the benefits he hopes to secure through it. In case this ritual (*homa*) is allowed to reach its conclusion, without interruption, it will be very difficult to defeat Ravana.”

Very soon day dawned. In accordance with Rama’s orders, Angada and Hanuman went to the ritual enclosure with a large following. They leaped in great hilarity and surrounded Ravana’s palace. “Sacriligious sacrificer!

Fleeing from battle and finding safety at home, are you sitting cosily, performing meditation?” Angada dared to go very near him and deal him a kick with his foot.

Ravana was engaged in preparatory silence and meditation. Even the slightest movement or distraction of attention would make him unfit and unholy, so that the sacrifice he was to perform for achieving victory would be rendered infructuous. Angada and the monkeys took liberties with him. Some of them dug their teeth into him. A few tugged at his crown of hair.

That was the limit. Ravana became fiercely angry; he rose to his feet and, catching hold of a few monkeys, twirled them fast over his head and tried to smash them on the ground. But he could not move even a little step. This became a matter of greater shame. Soon, a regular scramble and struggle ensued between Ravana and monkeys. The ritual ceremony he had planned could not be gone through. Ravana was sunk in grief.

Rama was informed of all that had happened. Vibhishana and others were happy at the consummation of their strategy.

Ravana fights again

Ravana was badly disappointed that his sacrifice did not succeed. But he had to resolve dutifully to proceed to the battle field. As soon as he started from his palace, bad omens greeted him. Kites flew in and out on his head and his hands, and his crown slipped from its place. He paid no regard to the warnings. He ordered the war drums to be beaten and the clarions sounded. Hundreds of thousands of demons (*rakshasas*) gathered when that signal was given. The army proceeded to wage a mortal battle against Rama.

Rama equipped himself with the arrow case and took the bow in his hand. With his long arms and broad chest, the splendour-filled embodiment of charm stood on the battlefield, the very picture of heroic might; the gods assembled overhead and offered reverent homage to the saviour of humanity from the demon hordes.

The monkey army followed Rama, arrayed in perfect order and alert to command. Like the thunder-spitting clouds bringing destructive floods on the earth on the day of deluge, the monkey hordes moved fast toward the demon forces, bent upon annihilating the enemy. The mountain peaks that the combatants threw against the enemy fell with the noise of thunder; in an instant, the chariots, elephants and horses of the demon armies were destroyed. Thousands and thousands of demons fell on the ground. Blood flowed in rivers.

Ravana lost all his warriors. He felt he was alone and that the monkeys and bears were many. So, he decided to draw on his magic powers. He exercised magic on all except Rama. But Rama willed otherwise. Through His will, Ravana saw a vast ocean of monkey hordes wherever he turned, with Rama and Lakshmana in the vanguard, leading the forces. Ravana realised that his magic could not produce any effect.

Rama fights and kills Ravana

Soon, Rama called the monkeys to his presence and told them in grave seriousness: “You are all exhausted by the long and hardy battle. Go and rest. Watch the fight between Rama and Ravana.”

No sooner had he said these words than Ravana encountered Rama with a challenging roar.

Rama smiled and said in a soft voice, “Fool! First listen to the words of moral counsel I am giving. There are three types of people in the world. The first are like the *patali* tree, whose blossoms are fine but don’t turn into

fruit. Those who indulge in mere speech and don't practise a mite of what they talk about are of this type. The second group are like the plantain tree. It gives flowers and fruits, both. Those who speak and act and practise what they assert are of this type. The third type is like the jack tree—it has no flower, but only fruits. The best type are like this. They don't prattle or boast or talk high; they are silent workers who act with no boast.

“You are a mere braggart. Your immoral rule has brought ruin on your race.”

Ravana was not in a mood to swallow these imputations. “What? Dare you teach me?” he said, pouring out a stream of abuse. Suddenly, he shot a bunch of hard-hitting arrows at Rama. Rama replied with the fire arrow, and Ravana's arrows were burned to ashes. Ravana directed millions of sharp-edged wheels and three-pronged spears against Rama, but the hopes of his wicked heart were not fulfilled. Rama thereupon lifted his redoubtable bow and shot a stream of deadly arrows, which flew straight at Ravana like irresistible messengers of death and cobras eager to inject their fatal venom.

Rama noticed that as soon as one head was sliced off by his arrow, another grew in its place. Ignoring his impending death, Ravana was immersed in pride; he challenged Rama in great exultation. It was a ghastly sight. The heads that rolled to the ground were shouting, “Where is that Rama? Where is Lakshmana? Where is Sugriva?” The heads that remained on the trunk were gnashing their teeth and asking for Vibhishana, pouring abuses on him. They said, “Brother of mine! Shame on you for awaiting the news of your brother's death, so that you may succeed him on the throne! You are not a hero; you are a cowardly ascetic. Fie on you. No one should look you in the face.”

Soon the lost heads reappeared, and Ravana fought fiercely and with unequalled valour. Lakshmana, Sugriva, and Angada watched him and admired his prowess.

Finally, Rama resolved that Ravana's end should no longer be delayed. His iniquities were multiplying with every passing day. Nala, Nila, and other monkey heroes were casting rocks at Ravana, and hurting him greatly. But the dusk of evening intervened and the battle ended for the day.

That night, Thrijata sat near Sita, describing the battle between Rama and Ravana. She told her that whenever Rama sliced off a head, another grew in its place. Sita's face paled at this news; she sank in sadness. Thrijata was surprised at this development; she said, “Do not yield to anxiety. His heart has your form enshrined in it; that is why the heads grow.”

At this Sita became both sad and happy. Thrijata hastened to add, “Sita! Have no doubt. His end is imminent. Rama will triumph. Rama also remembers you every time he shoots an arrow; he too has your form in his heart. So, the end is prolonged until the moment comes when Ravana gives up your memory for a short while. That moment will spell his doom; he will be killed that instant.”

Ravana filled the next day of the battle with his magic mystery. The battlefield was filled with his creations—ghosts, eerie beings, and sprites with bows and arrows. Female spirits danced around, holding swords in one hand, gorging blood from skulls held in the other. “Hold, beat, kill,” they yelled in screaming voices. In whichever direction the monkeys advanced, they were met by high walls of fire. The monkeys and bears were astounded. A thick rain of sand fell without stop on the monkey forces. Ravana roared in glee at the plight of his enemy. Lakshmana, Sugriva and others were incapacitated. The warriors prayed pathetically to Rama to come to their help.

Rama was besieged by many “Hanumans” created by Ravana's magic. Each “Hanuman” carried huge moun-

tain peaks; they also attempted to bind Rama in the knots of their tails! The tails coiled and grew over many miles in all directions. But Rama shone unconcerned and unharmed, blue like a fresh blossom in the midst of all the carnage and confusion. He knew that it was all the frail product of demon magic. He laughed within himself at Ravana's efforts to mystify him. With a single arrow shot from his bow, he destroyed all the varied effects of that magic skill. The monkeys and bears saw the frightful scenes disappear in a trice, and they were happy. The entire thing melted away as fog before the rays of the sun, as soon as Rama's arrow entered it.

The monkeys caused a hailstorm of stone to fall on Ravana. They jumped all around him with the missiles. Rama then selected a sharp arrow and shot it straight at Ravana. It sliced off a head. Another grew on the spot in a trice. It happened again and again. Rama watched the fun and seemed to be enjoying it. He remembered the phenomenon of greed coming in place of gain; as soon as something is gained, greed for more is born. He pictured the falling head as gain and the growing head as greed!

The battle that ensued between Rama and Ravana was fought with incomparable and unexcelled fury. The saying goes that the ocean is like the ocean and the sky is like the sky. They cannot be compared with any other phenomenon. So too, the battle between Rama and Ravana has that battle alone as equal to it. It lasted for eighteen days!

Rama was not in the least exhausted by the fighting. It was a sport, a pastime for him! There were a few more days left before the fourteen years' exile was to end, so he could well afford to engage himself in the game of war. If Rama decides on the finale, how can Ravana postpone his end or change the decision?

When the allotted days were over, everything conspired to create bad omens for Ravana. Dogs howled, foxes moaned, donkeys brayed. Birds and beast set up piteous wails. Balls of fire dropped from the sky. Sudden bursts of flame became evident in all directions. Queen Mandodari's heart beat loud and fast. Every idol in every home and temple in the island shed tears in plenty. Tornadoes spread havoc over hill and dale. Alerted by these calamitous signs, the gods knew that the end of the demons was near, and they gathered overhead to witness the triumph of righteousness, shouting, victory, victory (*jai! jai!*)!

Then Rama shot a bunch of thirty-one arrows at the same instant on Ravana. They darted like deadly cobras. One arrow entered the "nectar jar", which Ravana had underneath his navel; the rest, the thirty, sliced off his heads and hands. When the heads and limbs rolled on the ground, they hopped about and rose and fell in a frantic dance for some little time and then lay quiet. Thus, Ravana rid himself of life and reached heaven. The day was the fourteenth of the bright half of the *Chaithra* month (the second spring month).

That instant, a host of heavenly drums resounded from the sky. Ravana's splendourous spirit merged in Rama. Struck by that vision, the monkey warriors were aghast with wonder. They were amazed at Rama's valour and heroism in the battle against Ravana, which lasted a full 18 days. They exclaimed with one voice: "Victory, Victory to Rama."

Mandodari grieves

Hearing that Ravana had died, queen Mandodari, collapsed on the floor. When she recovered, she hastened with her maids to Ravana's corpse and wailed aloud. She collected the heads and was stricken with grief at the tragic fate of her lord. She recited with fond reminiscence Ravana's exploits in the past. "Lord! You had overwhelmed and subjugated the entire creation. The rulers of the eight directions had fallen at your feet, praying for

protection. Of what avail was all that glory! Of what avail were the austerities and asceticism that you underwent; you had to endure this fate in spite of all the might you had won. This blow fell upon you since you turned away from Rama. You couldn't conquer the promptings of lust; he who becomes a slave to lust cannot escape dire punishment, be he as powerful as even the god of death, Kala. Blinded by lust, you couldn't avoid this tragic end. Lust led you to ignore Rama and invited this calamity on your head.

“Ravana! Rama incarnated with the purpose of destroying by the fire of his anger the forest of demon (*rakshasa*) vice. I told you this many times, but a cruel fate rendered you deaf to my importunities. I told you that he is no mere man. You relied foolishly on your physical prowess, your clever intellect, vast treasures, and the vast numbers of demons you ruled over. Didn't I plead with you, holding your feet in my hands, to surrender to Rama, the ocean of mercy, and thus save the demons from annihilation? You didn't welcome my pleadings. You engaged constantly in inflicting injury on others, an activity that gave you great joy. You seldom attempted to confer benefits on others. Your urges were ever toward sinful deeds and thoughts. In spite of this, Rama has conferred his blessing and your spirit has merged in him. What great compassion this is! You died at his hands—a fortune that few can achieve. Why, Rama came into this world in human form for the special purpose of killing you.

“The royal road to the destruction of the demon (*rakshasa*) race was laid by the demon ruler himself! This will be known as your greatest achievement! This is the supreme example of your protective skill! Is this the final result of all your austerity and spiritual practice (*sadhana*)?”

“Rama! Have you done this to prove that no one can escape the consequences of their deeds? What greater example for that law can there be? This calamity brought about by him is here for all to see and learn from,” Mandodari wailed for a long time, sitting by the side of her lord.

Mandodari had realised through her wisdom that Rama was the highest Brahman (*Parabrahma*) Itself, the Universal Oversoul, the Absolute. The gods watching her from heaven were elated at her outlook and attitude at this hour of grief.

Ravana's funeral

Vibhishana was moved by Mandodari's wailing. He agreed that what she said and felt were correct. Rama and Lakshmana approached Vibhishana and consoled him. They directed him to perform the funeral rites for his deceased brother. And according to that order, he carried out all the prescribed rites and rituals, at the proper places and with correct ceremony. Mandodari and other women also offered water offerings, sanctified with *mantras* and sesame. Every item of the funeral rite was carried out in correct order, without any hitch or disturbance, by Vibhishana, who was all the while comforted and consoled by Rama. Rama said that when the curses Ravana had invoked on himself by his sins had ripened and fulfilled themselves, he was killed, so there was no reason to lament the death.

Vibhishana becomes emperor of Lanka

Rama called Lakshmana with Sugriva, Jambavan, and Angada and asked them to go into Lanka with Nala, Nila, and others to install Vibhishana as the emperor of Lanka. He told them to proceed without delay, for the fourteen years' exile that the father had prescribed for him would end the next day.

But Vibhishana protested and pleaded, “Why do I need an empire? Please place me instead in the immediate

presence of your lotus feet,” he prayed. “From this day Lanka is yours; treat Lanka as part of Ayodhya,” he insisted. But Rama didn’t agree. He elucidated their political principles and declared that his order was irrevocable. Then, Vibhishana prayed that he should be entrusted with the empire by his own hands.

Rama replied, “No. Having observed and followed my father’s command for thirteen years, eleven months and twenty-nine days, it is not proper for me to go against it on the very last day. I am in exile, as he desired, and an exile should not enter any town or human settlement. You are not unaware of this rule.” Thus saying, he blessed Vibhishana and instructed Lakshmana to go into Lanka and install the new emperor on the throne of Lanka.

Bowing their heads in acceptance of this assignment, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Angada, Nala, Nila, and others started toward the city and reached the palace. They placed the crown on Vibhishana’s head and put the auspicious mark of authority on his forehead.

Vibhishana prostrated before the assembly of monkeys and, acknowledging their friendly help, promised to fulfil the real purpose of his life through following their example and benefiting by their help. “I shall rule over this land as Rama’s agent; I won’t accept it as mine. I have already dedicated all of myself to Rama.” He suffered great grief when he reminded himself of the cruelties and injuries inflicted by Ravana, his sons, and his warriors on the monkey hordes, but he consoled himself by the thought that everything that had happened had been the “sport” of the Supreme Will, Rama. Soon, they returned to Rama and fell at his feet in reverential homage.

Hanuman visits Sita

Rama called Hanuman and told him, “O Hanuman, incomparable hero! Go into Lanka on my errand once more, tell Sita all that has happened, and return with authentic news about her condition.”

Accordingly, Hanuman entered Lanka, went to Sita, and fell at her holy feet. She asked him, “Are Rama and Lakshmana safe, with their monkey forces? Is Rama, the ocean of compassion, safe and happy?”

Hanuman replied with folded palms and bowed head. “Rama is safe and happy in all respects. He killed Ravana and installed Vibhishana as the permanent emperor of this land.”

Sita was glad at the news of Rama’s victory and Ravana’s downfall. Her face brightened with joy; she felt a great thrill of delight. Tears of joy streamed from her eyes. “O leader of monkeys! What can I offer you as a gift for conveying to me this best of news? Nothing can equal in value the comforting words you have spoken.”

Hanuman replied, “Mother! The bliss you evinced, the blossoming of joy —they have given me as much as a gift of the three worlds. What more can I crave? What greater fortune can anyone need than the fortune of seeing Rama victorious over the enemy and happy with his brother?” He prostrated once again at Sita’s feet.

Sita said, “O best among monkeys! I am sunk in agony these ten months of separation from my Lord, so I could not see or know anything about the external world. I don’t know which day of the week it is, or whether it is the bright or dark fortnight, or which day it is in that fortnight. Whatever it is, you have given me the most welcome and auspicious news; so, I shall name it the Day of Auspiciousness (*Mangala* day) —although it may generally be named otherwise. (It was Tuesday). May this day be held sacred and may you, the bringer of this news, be adored specially on this day more than on any other days of the week.” Hanuman fell at her feet and stood with folded palms.

Sita pleaded with Hanuman, “Get me the boon of meeting the embodiment of charm and compassion, my

Lord Rama. Don't you know that all this fighting and killing in war was for my sake, for the sake of restoring me to my Lord? Take me soon to the lotus feet of Rama," she said plaintively.

Hanuman couldn't bear the anguish that was patent in Sita's words. He leaped into the sky and reached Rama in a trice. He narrated all that happened during the meeting.

Sita is brought to Rama

Rama gathered Angada, Vibhishana, and others and told them to go to Sita and bring her respectfully to his presence. They went to the grove of *ashoka* trees where she was so long interned; Vibhishana directed that Sita may take a bath, wear fine silk clothes, and be decked in jewels when she moved out of the garden (*ashokavana*). But Sita cast aside the suggestion. "Rama is the most precious jewel I have; that one jewel is enough for me. Seeing him is the bath I shall be satisfied with. The prostration I shall do for him is the silk cloth for me. I don't like to wear anything that was once Ravana's property."

Vibhishana was moved by the depth of her yearning. He asked the maids to respect her wishes; they said that Sita was desperately wishing for the sight of her Lord.

Soon, a palanquin was brought and Sita was seated in it. The monkeys bore the palanquin on their shoulders. The demon women who had survived, the monkey warriors, and others jumped with excitement on both sides of the road when Sita passed by. They stood on tiptoe and even jumped high to get a clearer and nearer view. But Sita didn't turn to right or left; she bent her head and was sunk in one single thought: Rama. When a little distance had yet to be covered, Sita got off the palanquin, for she felt that she should go to her Lord in humility, walking the distance. She walked slowly toward Rama; as she neared Him, the monkeys standing along the path fell at her feet and cheered, "Victory, victory (*jai, jai*) Sita Ram."

The ordeal of fire

When Sita came within a short range, Rama declared that she should not be brought to him immediately, but that she had to go through the ordeal of fire!

The monkeys were stunned into silence and despair. But they had to go and collect dry sticks and fuel for lighting and feeding the fire for the rite of ordeal. The monkeys had carried on their shoulders huge mountain peaks and rocks before and during the war with Ravana; now, those very monkeys were finding little sticks of dry wood too heavy for their strength, for their hearts were heavy at the thought of Sita being put through this new trial!

Of course, Rama knew that Sita had spotless character and was the very embodiment of virtue. And, Vibhishana, Angada, Sugriva, and others knew that the fire ordeal was only to convince the world. The fact was that the divine power (*sakthi*) that "was" Sita was transmitted and installed in fire, when they were in the Dandaka Forest. The Sita who was in Lanka was but the body; the vital core (*sakthi*) was all the while fostered in fire by fire. Now, she had to pass through fire so that she might emerge as the real Sita, embodied divine power (*sakthi*).

Sita welcomed the rite, for the world would be convinced that her heart was pure and unblemished. She was happy to see the flames leap up. However, Lakshmana was overcome with grief, for he himself had to supervise the rite. Sita consoled him with her soft counsel. "Lakshmana! When I was married, the *brahmins* lit the fire on the wedding day and sanctified the function. Today, fire will give me new birth; after that, I will wed the Lord again.

Feed the fire well, for that is the right thing to do.”

Lakshmana was moved by her pang of separation, her yearning for reunion, her loyalty to righteousness, her attachment to justice, and her intelligent analysis of the situation. He shed tears and folded his palms in reverence and stood silent, for he could find no words to express his feelings. Fixing his gaze on Rama’s face, he piled firewood on firewood and lit the fire till it blazed.

Sita was elated when she saw the leaping flames. She had no trace of fear in her mind. She walked toward the fire and, standing before it said, “O Receiver of Sacred Offerings! By word or deed or thought I have not dwelt in my mind on anyone other than Rama, my Lord, O Purifier. You reside in the heart of every living being. Become as cool as sandal paste to me, when I enter you.”

She prostrated before Rama and moved into the fire. The god of fire, Agni, appeared in the form of a *brahmin* bringing with him the real Sita and offered her at Rama’s feet, just as the Lord of the ocean of milk offered Lakshmi at Lord Vishnu’s feet. She shone on Rama’s left like a golden lily by the side of a full-blossomed blue lotus. The gathering of gods expressed their joy by sounding heavenly drums and trumpets.

Rama and Sita take their leave

Vibhishana hurried into the city and brought clothes and jewels fit for Divinity in the aerial chariot named Pushpaka; he placed them before Rama. Rama asked that the chariot be taken high up in the sky and the valuables be showered from there on the people below. Vibhishana did as directed; the monkeys grabbed whatever fell on them or near them. They mistook the gems to be red, ripe fruit. When they found from the taste that they were stones, they cast them away in disgust. Rama and Sita enjoyed this fun and laughed in sympathy. Many monkeys and bears wore the clothes they secured and approached Rama in gratitude. Dressed in multi-coloured costumes, they danced about in ecstasy.

Rama appreciated them and addressed them most graciously; “O monkeys! Through your prowess and valour, I was able to destroy Ravana and place Vibhishana on the throne of Lanka. Now, you can all return to your own homes. I will always be with you. You need have no fear hereafter.” Rama consoled and comforted them all by the gracious gesture, promising his eternal protection and assuring them that there would be no occasion for them to fear anyone or any calamity.

The monkeys and others were overwhelmed by gratitude for the love he showered on them. They lost all moorings of their minds. They stood, folding their palms in reverential homage, and said, “Lord, your words are in consonance with your majesty; they confuse us and render us dumb. We are weaklings; you are our protector and guardian. You rule over the three worlds. Can a fly ever claim to have given help to the eagle? Can a tiny lamp claim to reveal the sun by its light?” The monkeys fell at Rama’s feet and stood with tear-streaming eyes.

The monkeys and bears felt they had to obey Rama’s orders, however unwilling they were to depart from his presence. They turned toward their homes with mixed feelings of joy and grief, praying to Rama for His continued blessing and with His form imprinted on their minds. Nala, Sugriva, Hanuman, Vibhishana, and other leaders and warriors could not give utterance to their feelings; they stood silent with looks fixed on Rama’s face, trying to subdue their anguish. Observing the depth of their love and attachment, Rama had them seated in the aerial chariot named Pushpaka, which he was ascending. The aerial chariot (*pushpaka*) took off and turned north.