

RAMAYANA: A KING'S DHARMA

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ACT 3

EXTERIOR. DANDAKA HUT.

Rama and Sita sit outside of the Dandaka Hut. It's peaceful, as every early morning is.

Sita is braiding and combing Rama's wet tangled hair. It clearly hurts, as Sita tightly wraps one strand over the next. Over, under, over, under.

Lakshmana comes out of the Danka Hut holding makeshift tools, hair also wet, but neatly done up in a braided bun.

LAKSHMANA

That should be it. No more wobbly deck. I just forgot to secure--

Rama excitedly hugs Lakshmana, forcing Sita to forego the current braid strand.

RAMA

It's perfect. You did a great job.

LAKSHMANA

Are you hungry or something? You can't even see it--

SITA

No, Rama's just a wimp and doesn't want me to finish his hair.

RAMA

We have all day to finish my hair.

(returning to Sita)

Especially since I've have a story to tell you, my love.

SITA

Let me guess, it's a word-for-word retelling of "Vyasa's" apocalyptic future. Yeah, I think we've heard that one enough times. The Sages' favorite--

(After second thought)

Pretty sure you're in it too....Wait....

RAMA

Ha-ha, no, not that one. That one's too long to tell in one sitting, which is why the Sages had to tell us bits and pieces here and there. No, this one I just dreamed of last night. Thought you might like it, and maybe Lakshmana might too.

SITA

Ugh, does that mean there's violence?

RAMA

I promise to keep the violence to the minimum.

SITA

You better. That's the whole point; remember when we lived with the Sages? No violence, especially coming from you. If so, you'll scare away Mira.

The gold deer walks shyly up to Sita. She whispers quietly to it which coaxes the deer to lie down with its head in her lap.

LAKSHMANA

Holler when you get to the spicy parts. I'm going to find food.

Lakshmana collects his bow and arrows.

SITA

Don't hunt Mira's friends!

LAKSHMANA

(on his way out of sight)

Not everyone can speak to animals, Sita!

RAMA

(giddy)

Are you ready?

SITA

Let's hear what you've got.

RAMA

(Sitting close to Sita, also stroking Mira's coat)

One day, there was a woman like yourself: radiant, youthful, hopeful...in love. It was if she had the world ahead of her--like you do--but for one small difference: she was born in a demonic world--a world of vanity and selfishness.

Suddenly, a heavenly golden city surrounds the couple. A YOUNG DEMON WOMAN, similar to Sita's age, is shoved out of a glistening marble home, crying. *Cry elsewhere!* can be heard from its resident.

She roams the streets and cautiously attempts to distance herself from the drunk, half-naked PEDESTRIANS. From the cracked-open golden doors, raunchy party-goers could be heard.

RAMA (CONT'D)

This world attracted those who wanted to enjoy only the pleasures in life. Finding herself stuck in this fake reality, the princess fled north, eventually settling herself in the forest. As fate would have it, she ran into a Danavan prince named Vidyutjihva.

In Rama and Sita's place are now VIDYUTJIHVA and SURPANAKHA. We are now in the distant past. It's neither night or day. Vidyutjihva and Surpanakha are cuddling, both a disheveled mess.

VIDYUTJIHVA

Come again? Your brother is a king? How come you have never mentioned this to me before?

SURPANAKHA

Nobody has bothered to ask about my family. Maybe because I'm not a big part of it? I've always been the independent sorts, especially since my family and I disagree about everything.

VIDYUTJIHVA

Yes, you definitely can hold your own, that's for sure. Somehow, you always manage to find me when I'm lost, which is quite often and for long periods of time too.

SURPANAKHA

Yes, the forests are not kind to those who do not call them home.

VIDYUTJIHVA

At this point, maybe I should. I also am not wanted back home. Not until I prove that I am not a waste of space. That's what happens when you have three other brothers who are all better in every way, you know? Maybe I should move to the forest with you. I know I'm not a--

(Song in the spirit of "ONLY US" performed by Laura Dreyfuss)

Surpanakha doesn't care that Vidyutihva is of a different race. Rather, he spends the time to listen.

Similarly, Vidyutihva is grateful for Surpanakha's companionship. She doesn't care if he is a pitiful warrior.

Surpanakha and Vidyutihva decide that it would be better to be alone in the forest, just the two of them, than to face the reality of what the world asks them to be.)

SURPANAKHA

(half-haphazardly putting on her gowns)

Let's go.

VIDYUTJIHVA

Go where?

SURPANAKHA

Get up, get up! We're going to make this place your home.

SITA

(elsewhere)

Rama, you better not be hinting at something.

RAMA

(elsewhere)

What?

SITA

We are only going to be here for another year. Right?

RAMA

Oh! Yes. This is...No! No, this is not a story about us. Yes, we will only be here another year.

SITA

We'll see...

RAMA

Eventually, Surpanakha and Vidyutjihva make it back to the demon world. For Surpanakha, this would be her first time back since she fled.

Hand-in-hand, Surpanakha and Vidyutjihva approach a YOUNG RAVANA. Both wearing their most elegant gowns. Surpanakha introduces Vidyutjihva.

RAMA (CONT'D)

Noticing love in her eyes, the King smiled and decided to wed the two. The princess has finally discovered the pleasure in love. However, as the King turned his back--

Vidyutjihva lunges at Ravana with a knife. We're suddenly in Ravana's great hall, where all of SURPANAKHA'S FAMILY can be seen attending the wedding ceremony. The knife nicks Ravana in the back. Ravana reflexively brandishes his sword and slices Vidyutjihva's head off. Surpanakha screams, and lunges for Vidyutjihva, landing right on top of his severed head.

Ravana notices the pendant around Surpanakha's neck. It has a Danavan signet.

RAVANA

(to Surpanakha)

You are a traitor.

Surpanakha continues to weep as the head turns to ash.

RAVANA (CONT'D)

And here in the world of pleasure, we have no room for tears.

Surpanakha's family jeers.

We're back at the peaceful Danka Hut. Mira has resorted to sleeping on the grass. Rama places his head on Sita's lap.

RAMA

After being subjugated to such humiliation, Surpanakha again fled the Demon city.

SITA

She didn't deserve to be treated that way.

RAMA

True. Sometimes fate can be cruel, but only Time will tell. The best thing we can do is act according to what is right.

SITA

(Speculatively)

Whose to say what's right?

RAMA

The Sages, our fathers and mothers, our friends... they deserve our utmost respect. Enacting such respect is the right thing to do. That is what's right.

SITA

Continue your story.

RAMA

Why? It only gets uglier.

SITA

(sheepishly)

So we don't end up talking in circles about *Dharma*.

RAMA

Alright...

Surpanakha has reached the Dandaka Hut still in her beautiful garments. She notices Rama and Sita, giggling among themselves.

RAMA (CONT'D)

I better get Lakshmana. This is the saucy part!

(gets up and looks for Lakshmana)

Lakshmana! This will be your favorite part!

SITA

We finally got there! For once, we've gotten almost to the end!

Rama nudges Sita jokingly.

Lakshmana appears from behind the hut carrying a basket of berries and other fresh food. He sets it down in front of the couple. Rama gingerly opens the basket and immediately begins to eat.

Lakshmana glances over to Sita and smirks.

LAKSHMANA

You're lucky I was close. Okay, get on with it.

RAMA

Where was I? Oh! Right: the demon princess fled, for the second time. Except this time, she was looking for another man--

SURPANAKHA

(coming out of the bushes)

Yes, I am!

RAMA

--to please her.

The three turn around and stare at Surpanakha, dressed to the nines in, what humans would consider, scandalous--yet exceptionally elegant--robes. By her behavior, she is clearly done trying to make good first-impressions.

SURPANAKHA

(sees Rama)

...Vidyutjihva?

RAMA

It's Rama. Nice to meet you.

RAMA (CONT'D)

(in disbelief)

Who are you?

SURPANAKHA

You know who I am.

LAKSHMANA

Your name.

SURPANAKHA

Surpanakha. Wif--Ex-wife of Vidyutjihva.

SITA

...and you think he's here?

SURPANAKHA

(lustfully)

If I pretend hard enough.

Lakshmana steps in between Rama and Surpanakha to try and ease the tension. With Lakshmana's naturally large stance, it only makes it worse.

SURPANAKHA (CONT'D)

(to Sita)

No wonder why Vidyutjihva didn't actually love me. He likes a different type of woman.

SITA

Rama is not Vidyutjihva.

SURPANAKHA

He looks quite alike per my memory. Same physique, same beautiful eyes. Say, Vid--
(pointing to Rama)
--you, over there. Why are you here in the forest?

RAMA

I have come to live in the jungle for 14 years with my brother, Lakshmana, and wife, Sita.

SURPANAKHA

Why?

RAMA

Per my father's orders.

SURPANAKHA

Why?

RAMA

I was banished.

SURPANAKHA
(walking towards Sita)

You see?

Mira flees, as does all her friends.

Somehow, we feel uncomfortably close to what's happening.

SURPANAKHA (CONT'D)
(back towards Rama)

Rama, that's it, right? You know my story. In fact, you know who I am outside of my story too. You know how powerful I can be. I can create an oasis for just us. No, envy, no curses, no family drama. Just peace. Let Fate hold her breath, and come start the life we've always dreamed of!

Sita looks dangerously at Rama.

RAMA
(sincerely)

If you are proposing I go off with you, I'm terribly sorry to say that will not be possible. As I said earlier, I am married to my wife, Sita. However, Lakshmana is still available.

Sita's glare turns to giggles. She is reminded of why she loves Rama.

LAKSHMANA

Yes, I am, but to marry me you'd have to be willing to serve my brother. Oh, wait, let me be clear: not in bed on your knees, if that's what you're thinking.

Now, both Sita and Rama are chuckling; Sita must have continued with Lakshmana's joke just between the two.

SURPANAKHA
(to Sita)

You think this is funny? Mocking me for the loss that I've suffered?

After all the self-control she was able to keep up until this point, Surpanakha lunges at Sita.

SURPANAKHA (CONT'D)

You don't deserve him-! I do--

Lakshmana brandishes his knife and slices Surpanakha's nose.

SURPANAKHA (CONT'D)
(gasping)

Vidyutjihva-!

Dark red blood bursts from her nose and down Surpanakha's beautiful face.

SURPANAKHA (CONT'D)
(to Sita)

You...You'll regret this. You'll see. They're all the same.

Surpanakha staggers off, her wedding robes stained with crimson blood.

SITA

Even though she wanted more than pleasure... I guess people don't change that much in the end. Did you see the way she looked at you?

RAMA

(serious)

Yes, even though I'm not quite sure why. She knows I'm marri--

Sita kisses Rama. Lakshmana smiles while he cleans his dagger off.

We suddenly are following YOUNG RAVANA as he inadvertently walks along Surpanakha's trail of blood. He is deep in various Vedic books while juggling instruments and a learner's weapon. He wears clothes that would normally be for *rishis*, and occasionally, he tries a chant to Shiva. Men, humans and Gods alike, stare in disgust: a *rakshasa*--a demon!--trying to be Man.

As he ages, his clothes transform into those which show the physique and prowess of the ultimate Self-made Emperor. The wisps of his new nine heads shadows the movement of his most handsome one--their presence so translucent and transient, mere mortals have to look twice to see them. But when you do see their ghostly movement and illusive beauty, it is Ravana's charming--and consumingly powerful--aurora you feel.

We're now in the present, and the self-made Emperor enters his royal court room, still reading the Vedic book from when he was a child.

INTERIOR. RAVAN'A COURT ROOM

RAVANA enters to a weeping SURPANAKHA. He stops dead in his tracks and finally notices all the blood on the floor. The trail leads to a larger pool which rests underneath his sister.

RAVANA

It's been quite some time, Surpanakha. What is it? 10 years now?

Murmuring.

RAVANA (CONT'D)

You've made quite the entrance. In front of all my ministers too. What happened? I've tried to tell my people to leave you alone--

Silence, as Surpanakha continues to wimper.

RAVANA (CONT'D)

(to his ministers)

Leave us, please.

Ravana walks over to Surpanakha's weeping form.

RAVANA (CONT'D)

Why did you come to me?

SURPANAKHA

You're the only one who would understand. Even though I despise everything that is Lanka, I have realized how foolish I have been.

Ravana helps Surpanakha to his throne. She sits, he kneels.

RAVANA

Tell me.

(The sentiments/dialogue below will eventually be translated to a duet.)

SURPANAKHA

You're right; we are not the same as them. Who am I to think I could escape that simple fact? But that does not mean they are perfect, no, those kyshatriyas think they can take everything. They take everything and leave us nothing! The Gods are on their side and what about us? What about you and me? We are just pawns in their game of vanity. They who can tear the innocent limb by limb, heart and soul.

RAVANA

Who has taken away your innocence?

SURPANAKHA

I should have known. Long ago with Vidyutjihva, I should have acted! I should of known that a rakshasa, no matter how faithful, could never be with a kyshatriya!

RAVANA

But it wasn't him, was it? You met someone else.

SURPANAKHA

Yes, I am ashamed to say I couldn't help it.

RAVANA

It is not your fault, my sister. Passion is within our nature.

SURPANAKHA

It was a woman.

RAVANA

A woman?

SURPANAKHA

A woman so...perfect. It is she who took away my innocence. Beautiful, witty, her husband's equal. She holds the key, Ravana, to a perfect life. A life of pure bliss: no violence or blemishes on her character. She is truly one with the Gods.

SURPANAKHA (CONT'D)

Of course, she is married to the perfect kyshatriya, Rama, so radiant I thought he was Vidyutjihva reincarnated. His brother is the one who did this to me when I lost control and lunged for her: Sita, who doesn't have to try.

RAVANA

Sita, the woman who holds the life Surpanakha deserves, and Rama, the godly respect I desire.

A breath.

SURPANAKHA

I have realized my place in this world, and it is one where you and I must level the playing field. Ravana, with all your knowledge in the *vedas* and weaponry, it is time to use those for the greater good! To show the vain and unworthy nature of the kshatriya!

RAVANA

Come, it is time for us to receive our perfect life! After years of rejection--of standing outside closed gates and unheard prayers--it is time for us to be rewarded for our resilience.

SURPANAKHA

Yes, the girl! Sita is the key to our freedom and to destroy the kshatriya name!

RAVANA

Then it's settled! Let us go--

SURPANAKHA

--to the Dandaka Forest! To the place I call home!

(End of Duet)

BLACKOUT

EXTERIOR. DANDAKA HUT.

RAMA and LAKSHMANA are playing a friendly game of dice. It's early evening, and the sunset glows brightly on the hut.

LAKSHMANA

You want to bet something, even when we left Ayodhya with nothing in our pockets? What are you going to bet?

RAMA

Not sure quite yet, but I'll think of something. Just to make things more interesting, else what's the point in playing?

LAKSHMANA

Fair. I'll let you do the betting. I'll take whatever I can get.

SITA

(off-stage)

Boys, have you seen Mira? I was going to feed her, but she seemed to have disappeared.

RAMA

(preoccupied)

No.

LAKSHMANA

Rama, look!

Lakshmana points to a deer in the distance.

LAKSHMANA (CONT'D)

Might that be Mira?

Both princes look towards the deer. The sun is blinding.

RAMA

Not sure. Maybe Sita would know?

(to Sita O.S.)

Sita! I think we found Mira!

Sita appears with a basket of fruit. Rama points towards the stoic deer. It is as if the deer is just as intrigued with them as they it.

SITA

Oh, my! It is not Mira, but it's beautiful! Rama, can't you see?

RAMA

No--

Sita quickly ushers him to a spot where the sun doesn't blind the two.

RAMA (CONT'D)

Wow. Lakshmana, this is quite the deer.

SITA

We should capture it! Mira would love a friend. We could name it Maya. Mira and Maya...what a duo. I'm excited already!

LAKSHMANA

(on deaf ears)

Sita, I don't know. I've hunted many deer before, and this one... it irks me.

SITA

Rama, would you capture it for me? I'm sure it would appreciate your many stories... I mean, its looking right at you.

RAMA

I don't know. It's been a while since I have hunted. If Lakshmana is uneasy, that worries me.

SITA

Fine. Then I will be sleeping outside with Mira while we wait for Maya to appear again. Lakshmana can take my place next to you.

LAKSHMANA

Sita, that's ridiculous--

RAMA

Lakshmana, sit down.

Lakshmana has turned around to see Rama sitting in front of the dice.

LAKSHMANA

You can't be serious.

RAMA

Sit down.

Reluctantly, Lakshmana sits, bow in hand.

RAMA (CONT'D)

Only two dice. Doubles, we go after the deer.

LAKSHMANA

I thought we decided not to go after the deer at all.

RAMA

(quietly to Lakshmana)

I know you might not believe me, but Sita has not asked for much these entire thirteen years, and I think I owe her one. Plus, if it is something evil, I will vanquish it. If not, Sita gets a friend. Either way, now...

(jiggling dice)

...we don't have to make the decision.

LAKSHMANA

Fine. Roll.

Rama rolls the dice. Lakshmana holds his breath.

Both look at the dice.

RAMA

Snake eyes.

(to Sita)

Sita, love, is the deer still there?

SITA

Yes, and has made friends with Mira, just as I'd hoped!

Just as Rama got up and grabbed his bow for the first time since they arrived at the Dandaka Hut, the deer sprints off. Rama runs after it.

LAKSHMANA

Ok, since Rama's gone, you're under my care.

SITA

I am fully capable of taking care of myself.

LAKSHMANA

Well, I came to the forest for both of your safety.

(sighs)

If it was Rama here, I would have said the same thing.

An awkward silence.

SITA

(adjusting her garments)

Is that really why you came?

LAKSHMANA
(quick to defend)

Yes.

SITA

It's...admirable.

LAKSHMANA

I'm glad you think so.

SITA

Rama needs a brother like you.

Lakshmana smiles.

SITA (CONT'D)

Honestly, I don't know how you dealt with him when you both were younger.

LAKSHMANA

We kept each other in line. I'd always make sure to support him whenever he made a difficult decision. He has this habit of being... overly truthful. He can never tell a lie. I personally don't understand it, but it has gotten him into some serious emotional trouble. So, yes, I've come to 'protect' him.

SITA

Tell me about it. It's as if he's the 'golden star' in his own drama. Title? 'Rama's Journey.'

Lakshmana bursts out laughing. The two continue to joke.

Simultaneously, out of view from the Hut, we hear Rama's heavy breathing as he closes in on the illusive deer. It stops, yet right as he is about to draw back his bow, the deer stares into his soul.

Rama forces himself to close his eyes, and only then does he release the arrow.

The deer screeches.

As Rama approaches the fallen deer, a woman can be heard gasping for air. Confused, Rama runs up to the unidentifiable woman.

RAMA
(to unknown woman)

What-!

(towards Hut)

Sita! Lakshmana! Help me!

(attempting to save the woman)

No, no, stay with me. My brother Lakshmana will come to help us. He always carries herbs with him, and Sita will bring water.

As Rama is per-occupied with tending the wound, the woman suddenly brings Rama for a kiss but hesitates to close the gap. Rama realizes who it is.

SURPANAKHA

I'm so sorry, Rama. Save her. Save her, please!

Rama is stunned.

SURPANAKHA (CONT'D)

(with deep sorrow)

No, no, you're already too late. It's too late!

SITA

(back at the hut)

You aren't just here for Rama!

Sita and Lakshmana are in the middle of an argument. All we know is that it started when Rama called out Lakshmana's name.

LAKSHMANA

(in the doorway of the hut)

Sita, what are you talking about? I am here to protect you, now come inside the hut with me, please.

SITA

Rama needs you, why are you not going to help? So much for being there for your brother!

LAKSHMANA

I know Rama better than anyone, and his shout was not one of pain. I need to make sure you're safe before I go anywhere.

SITA

Safe? Safe and sound within your arms? You're an *anarya*--a disgrace--if you think I'm going in there with you when Rama could be out there dying.

LAKSHMANA

Sita--

SITA

(slight pause)

You've been waiting for this moment, haven't you? You and Kaikeyi conspiring--

LAKSHMANA

How dare you accuse me of such a deviant act! I may not be as 'perfect' as Rama himself, but I have never lied to you. Ever. My duty is to protect you just as much it is to protect Rama, and not once have I ever had such sinful desires!

SITA

Then prove it! Prove you're here to protect your brother, and not just to steal the crown and me!

Lakshmana grabs his weapons from the hut and darts off to find Rama. Sita sits quietly on the porch.

His heart; that's all Rama hears as he attempts to make his way back to the Hut. The sun is no longer above the horizon and suddenly Rama struggles to find his way back.

As if circling the Hut, the princes run to find each other. The hut now the only place lit by the growing moon.

A gold ring falls from the sky in front of Rama's path. A lovebird, in the midst of mating, scream as his lover falls from the branch, a now bloody mess being struck by the signet ring. Rama freezes in horror as the bird mourns. Rama goes to pick up the bloody ring and immediately recognizes the engravings: It's Sita's.

LAKSHMANA

Rama! There you are!

RAMA

We've made a grave error.

LAKSHMANA

What's wrong?

Lakshmana follows Rama's gaze towards the sky.

LAKSHMANA (CONT'D)

Come, Sita is waiting for you.

RAMA

Why did you leave her?

Suddenly, Rama's wrathful gaze lands on Lakshmana.

LAKSHMANA

She--she said I was conspiring with mother Kaikeyi to have you killed! She accused me of lusting for her, and said to run after you to prove my dignity.

RAMA

That is an incorrect answer, Lakshmana.

Rama shows Lakshmana the ring.

LAKSHMANA

Oh, God, what have we done?

Both men run back towards the Hut to find it destroyed. Suddenly, the world begins to shrink in fear of Rama's wrath.

RAMA

(scrambling to find Sita and her things)

You... imbecile!

LAKSHMANA

Me?! You're the one who thought it was a good idea to run after the deer in the first place!

RAMA

You had one job, Lakshmana! One. Job. How the hell could you screw me over like this?

Lakshmana is at a loss for words.

RAMA (CONT'D)

Don't just stand there, FIND HER!

LAKSHMANA

(Runs off to find Sita)

Sita! Maa Sita, I'm sorry! Please come back!

We follow Rama as he peels over all the damage. It's clear someone has taken her.

(Rama's Solo. Similar in spirit to "NO GOOD DEED" performed by Indina Menzel. Rama grabs his weapons; he swears he will destroy everything in his path until he finds Sita and proves to his Father above that he is still the princely kyshatriya Dasaratha has always seen in him. Ultimately, it's a song of deep pain.)

INTERMISSION. END OF ACT 3.