

RAMA AND SITA

By Rachel Boxer

Long, long ago there lived a king. This king had four sons by three different wives: Rama (who was the oldest), Lakshman and Satrugna (who were twins)...and Bharat (the youngest).

It was a time for rejoicing in the kingdom of Ayodhya. King Dashratha's oldest son, Rama, had married the most beautiful princess - whose name was Sita - and now at last Dashratha could hand over the throne and the running of the kingdom. Rama was good and kind and the king knew that his kingdom would be in safe hands.

Unfortunately, the mother of Dashratha's youngest son, Bharat, was very jealous. She wanted the throne for Bharat, even though he was the youngest. And she also had a plan. Once, she had saved the King's life and, in return, he had promised her two wishes. Now she saw her chance to claim what he had promised her. She told the king that she wanted Rama to be sent away for fourteen years and her own son, Bharat, to be placed on the throne.

What was the king to do? He had made a promise, and being the good and honest man that he was, he felt he must fulfil it, even though he knew that he had been tricked. And so he reluctantly banished Rama to the forest, with his new wife, Sita and his brother Lakshman.

They walked and walked until, deep in the forest, they came across a little cottage - a perfect refuge for them in their banishment. For some while, they lived a simple, peaceful life - walking together and enjoying the quietness that they had found away from the busy life of the palace. But one day, all this changed...

Ravana was the demon king. He had twenty arms and ten terrible heads, each with a pair of red eyes that burned like hot coals and an ugly mouth full of yellow fangs. He spotted Sita and was so entranced by her beauty that he decided she should belong to him. And using his magic, he created a beautiful golden deer as a trap.

When Sita saw the deer, she begged Rama to catch it for her. Rama reluctantly agreed that he



would and placed Sita into a magic circle to keep her safe from any danger.

As soon as she was left alone, Ravana put the rest of his plan into action. He transformed himself into an old man and tricked Sita into stepping out of the magic circle. As soon as she did Ravana grabbed her and swept her into his chariot, pulled by winged demons. They flew high into the sky, towards Ravana's island home, Lanka.

Despite her terror, Sita thought quickly and when Ravana wasn't looking, she dropped her jewellery, piece by piece over the side of the chariot so that it would leave a trail on the ground below.

Meanwhile, back in the forest, Rama had tracked down the golden deer. It was in the middle of a little clearing now, with its back towards him, and so he spied his chance to claim Sita's prize. As he caught hold of the magnificent, golden deer, it transformed into a demon...and, at once, Rama realised he'd been tricked. Frantically, he ran back to the place where he had left Sita, fearing that he might be too late - and of course, he was!

His heart was filled with dread -

until he spotted the trail of jewellery. How clever his beautiful wife was, he thought, and he followed the clues she had left behind until they ran out. Now what should he do?

Rama didn't know it yet, but help was near at hand, for he had strayed into the kingdom of Hanuman, the monkey-king. As Rama sank to the forest floor in despair, coming towards him he saw a white monkey - Hanuman, the monkey-king - himself. He took Rama to the monkey city, a city that lay in a giant cave under the hills and on hearing Rama's tale, Hanuman called together the monkey army.

Messages were sent out and before long, monkeys gathered in their millions, ready to search for Sita, Rama's beautiful bride. Their friends, the great bears came too. And so the search began - a search that would last for almost as many years as Rama and Sita's banishment. Hanuman was not only the king of the monkeys, he also possessed special powers, as he could fly like a bird! So naturally it was he who found where Ravana was keeping Sita, imprisoned on his island. He spotted her sitting in a grove of trees near the palace.

When she found out who Hanuman was, Sita excitedly gave him a pearl from her hair to take to back to Rama. With a flurry of white fur, Hanuman swooped into the sky and was gone as quickly as he had come.

And so Rama, Lakshman and Hanuman prepared for the battle of all battles. As the armies gathered, they realised that Ravana had been very clever in placing his palace on an island, because they couldn't get to him - not unless they could either swim like a fish, or fly like a bird! But Hanuman had a plan and he told the monkey army to work together to build a bridge out of the rocks, grass and sand that lay on the edge of the shore.

As Rama and Lakshman watched in amazement, an army of furry woodland creatures - both small and large - came scuttling out of the undergrowth to help with the bridgebuilding, and before their eyes, a bridge grew until it spanned the distance to the island. Hanuman's animal army poured across the bridge to the island, and the fighting began. The battle was long and terrible - animals and demons fought against each other, good versus evil - but at last, Rama spotted the demon-king. Rama was a

great warrior, but in the evil Ravana, he had almost met his match. Each time he swiped his sword at one of Ravana's terrible heads and cut it off, another would straight away grow back in its place. Almost at his wit's end, Rama pulled out the bow that he carried on his back and with it a single arrow. It had been a gift from the gods, and as Rama took aim, he chanted a prayer that the arrow would meet its target. It shot out of the bow with a blinding flash of light and the demon-king fell to the ground, dead.

The whole world rejoiced. Not only was the evil Ravana defeated, but having completed their fourteen year exile, Rama and Sita could now return home. To celebrate their homecoming, the people of Ayodhya cleaned and polished, strung garlands of colourful flowers everywhere and decorated the footpaths outside their houses with brightly coloured Rangoli patterns. As the last glimmers of the day faded from the sky, people lit small lamps and placed them in the windows of their houses to guide Rama and Sita home. There seemed to be more flickering divas than stars in the sky and, as Rama was made King, the kingdom of Ayodhya could once more be at peace.