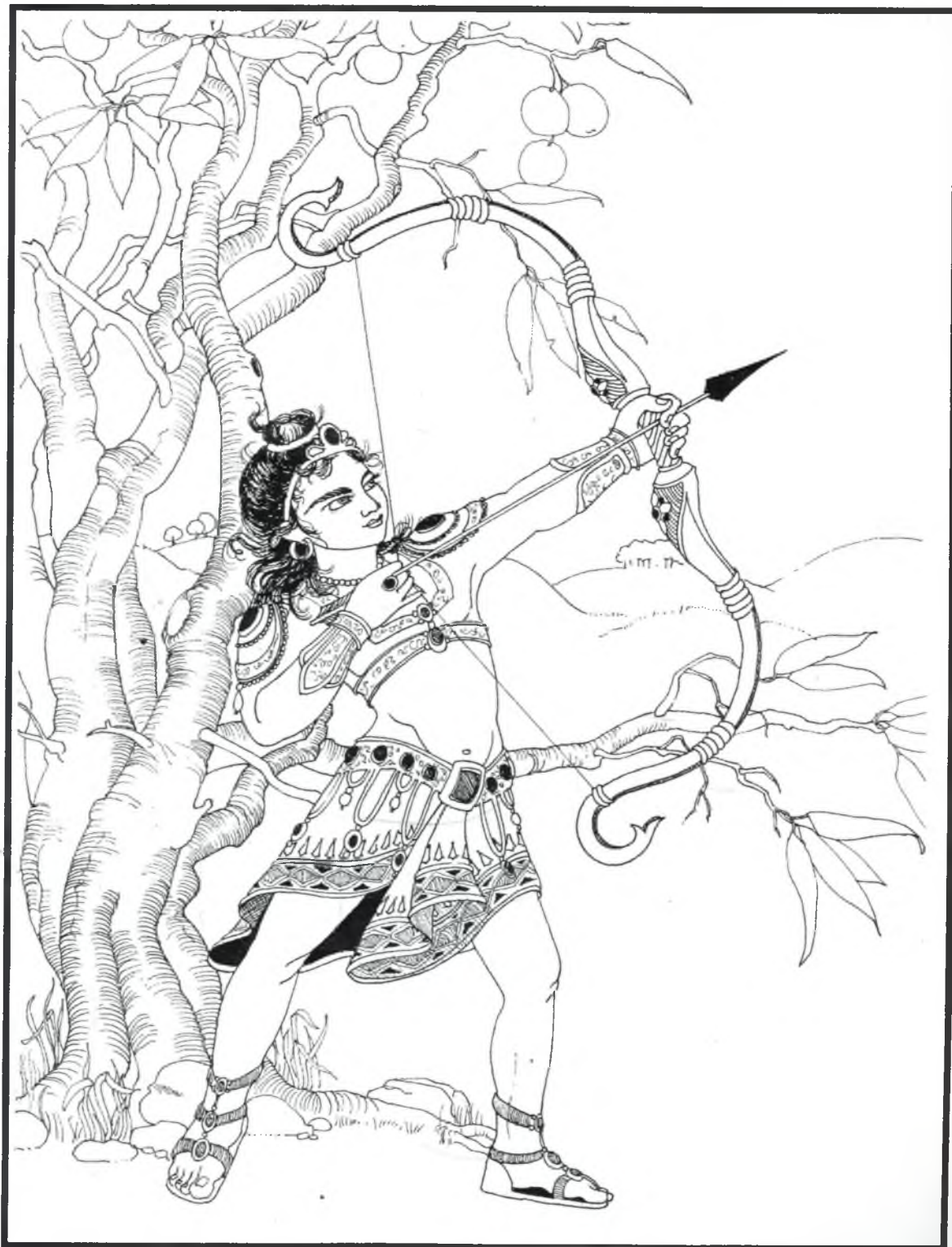


A Prince in Exile

story and coloring book



adapted from the Ramayana

FIRST PRINTING
200 Copies

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.
By Unlimited Graphics

A Prince in Exile

story and coloring book



THE RAMAYANA (the Journey of Rama) is perhaps the world's oldest literature. Cherished throughout India and Asia for millenia, it has been faithfully preserved and passed on in varied forms of popular expression - epic poems, folk tales, music, dance, drama, puppet shows, sculpture, paintings, even films and comic books. Its story and characters have captured the hearts and minds of countless generations.

Written by VRINDA DOHERTY

Artwork by ANN DOHERTY

Published by

CINTAMANI

art that inspires

www.annapurnaart.com

610 308 0387

Ravana

One dark night, many thousands of years ago, when saints and demons roamed the earth, a great and powerful king was born.

He was born with ten heads and twenty flailing arms. The thick copper-red hair on each of his ten heads glowed like fire. Though his mother lovingly named him Dasagriva, *Ten Heads*, he soon became known as Ravana, *Loud Wailing*. The cry of terror he incited in those around him shook the very foundation of the world. Indeed, the entire universe became his playground.

Ravana challenged every monarch, every warrior, every demigod, and no one in the universe was safe.

To unburden the Earth and to answer the prayer of all those who were distressed, God himself appeared in human form. The life-force of the universe, Lord Vishnu, left his resting place and accepted the burden of human tribulations. Born as a warrior in the Sun race, he walked earth's thorny paths as a brilliant sun, each step bringing him closer to his meeting with the demon, Ravana.

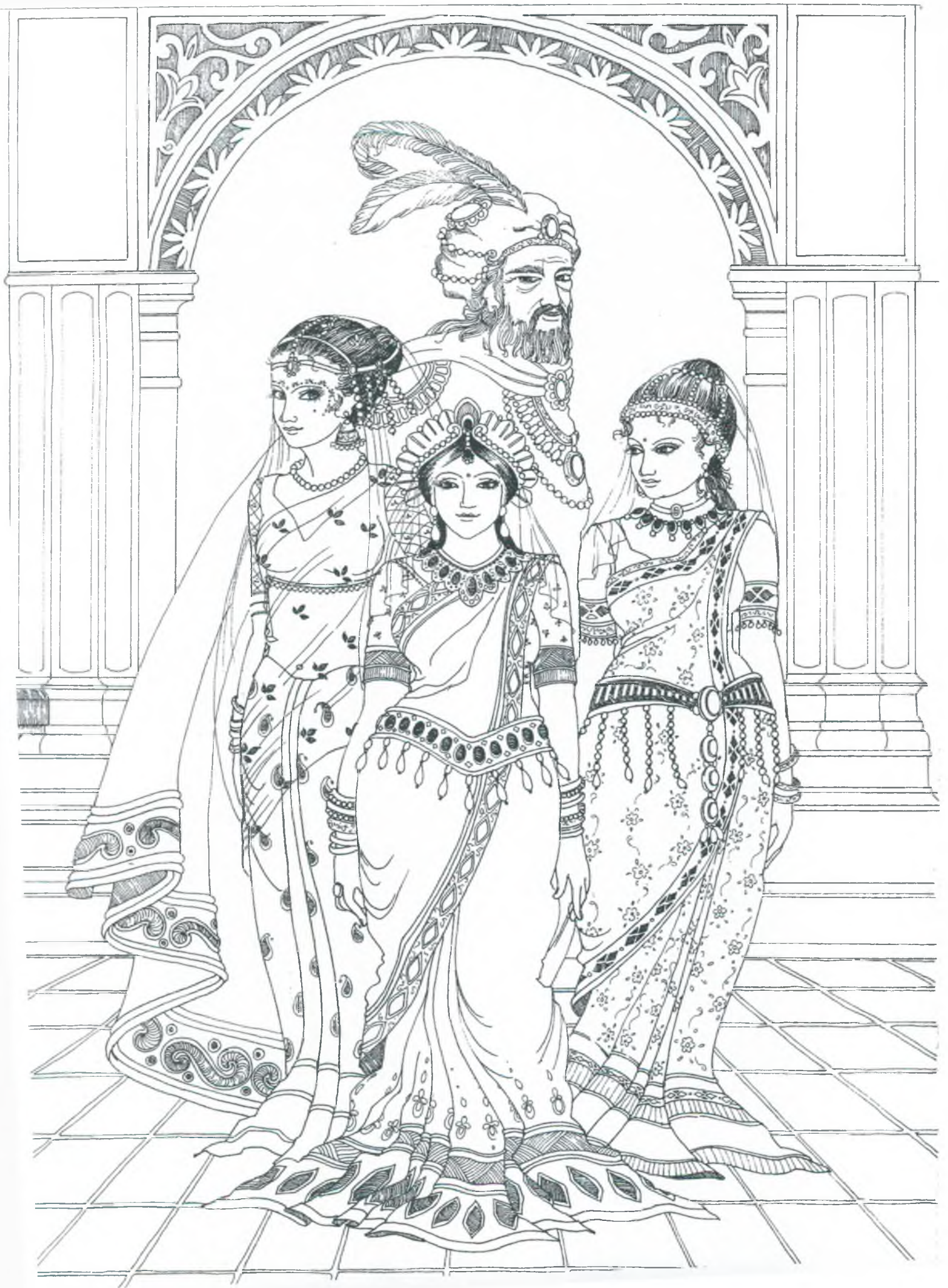


King Dasaratha and his Queens

As Ravana amused himself elsewhere, peace was gradually restored to the battle-ravaged planet. A great capital was built named Ayodhya, *The Unassailable*, and there King Dasharath ruled with a competent hand.

King Dasharath was supported by eight wise ministers and by his side stood not one queen but three. Each one was beautiful in her own right, like night and day, sun and moon. Both Kaushalya and Sumitra were better wives than one man deserved.

As time passed, however, neither of his lovely queens bore him any children. As emperor, an heir to the throne was what he needed the most. King Dasharath saw no other path than taking a third wife. He clasped Kaikeyi's hand in marriage only after solemnly swearing to her father that Kaikeyi's son would become the next king of Ayodhya. When he introduced Kaikeyi to Kaushalya and Sumitra, he did not notice that Kaikeyi deliberately stood separate from her co-wives. The king who had been careful to divide his free time equally between Kaushalya and Sumitra now went straight to Kaikeyi's chambers at dusk. Kaushalya and Sumitra nevertheless prayed that his apparent neglect of them would be fruitful, that soon a child's gurgles and cries would melt Kaikeyi's pride.



Balcony scene

King Dasarath stood on his palace-balcony watching the monsoon-rain infuse the earth with life and his citizens with contentment. Despite their happiness, he could not stop dissatisfaction from brewing in his heart. He was not a young man anymore, and even though he had three queens, he had no children. Suddenly, he felt a hand on his shoulder.

It was Kaikeyi, his most beloved queen. When she saw his tears, she simply wrapped her arms around him to comfort him. As her warmth and love seeped into him, his muscles relaxed, and he marveled at how much lighter a burden became when it was shared.



The Fire Sacrifice

There was another way. King Dasharath was amazed when he heard his minister's talk of an elaborate fire-ceremony where they would invoke the gods in heaven. This particular ceremony was designed specifically to produce children.

The preparations for the ceremony took one full year to complete. The day of the great sacrifice finally came, and the priests chanted sacred mantras in nasal tones, and volumes of ghee were poured into the various fire-pits. When the flames licked the heaven, and the fires were roaring, a heavenly creature appeared, almost like an extension of the fire. He stunned the entire assembly with his red complexion and mane of golden hair. In his hands he held a golden pot with a silver lid which shone with an unearthly glow.

When Dasharath brought the vessel to his queens, they saw the tears glistening in his eyes. He instructed them to drink from the heavenly pot. They had never tasted anything so sweet before, and instinctively, their hands rested protectively on their wombs.

A month later it was announced throughout the kingdom that all three queens were expecting!



Ravana and Vedavati

One day, Ravana in his boredom sought the mountain-regions to harass the many sages there. There he came upon Vedavati, Lakshmi incarnated, sitting cross-legged with her eyes closed. He felt like a thief who had stumbled upon an unguarded treasure. To awaken her, he lightly traced the shape of her head. When she was unaffected by his touch, he yanked her hair sharply.

He stumbled back as their eyes met, scorched by the burning fire in her eyes. She transformed the side of her hand into a sharp blade and severed the hank of hair he held, leaving it limp in his grip. Her voice crackled with anger as she spoke.

“My body has been defiled by your touch. But I will not give up this life in vain, for I will take birth again as a woman, and I will be the cause of your destruction.”

Directing the burning rage toward the center of her forehead, she uttered her lord Vishnu’s name and was consumed by the flames that erupted from between her brows and burned her entire body. Within seconds, only her ashes whirled around Ravana’s feet.

Soon after, a baby girl appeared at the feet of the saintly king Janaka, her limbs covered in dust. Because she came miraculously from the earth, the king and his wife named her Sita, *Furrow*.

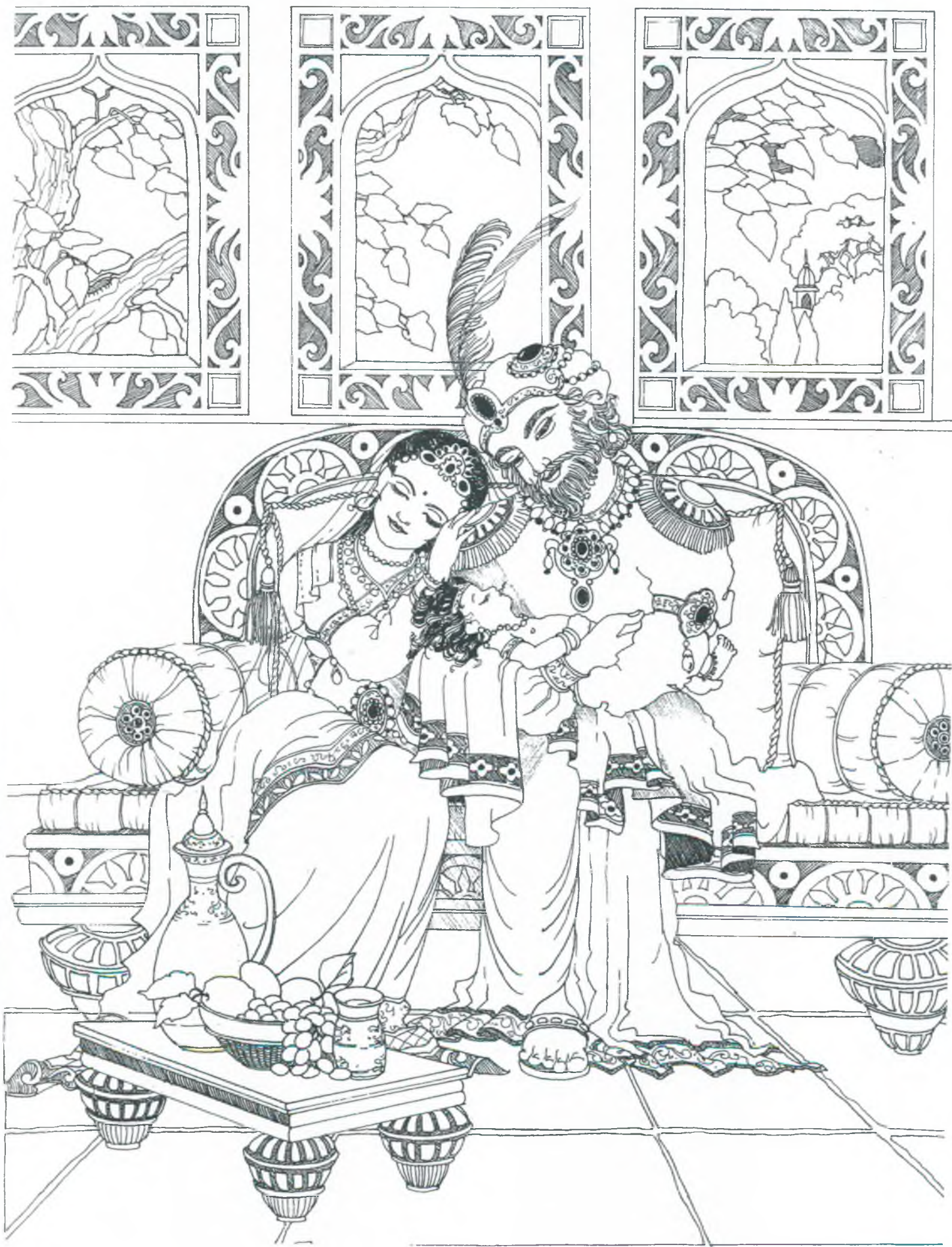


Ram's birth

The infant, Dasharath's first-born son, slept peacefully in Kaushalya's bed unaware of the many eyes that were gazing at him. That the small child was God himself, born to destroy evil, was inconceivable. Even the sages could not penetrate such a mystery. The baby would be named Ramachandra, *One Whose Mere Presence Pleases*.

As Kaushalya and Sumitra had hoped, motherhood had softened Kaikeyi's vanity, and the three women had found a common ground. When the still very pregnant Kaikeyi took baby Ram into her arms, Kaushalya felt tears welling up into her eyes. Kaikeyi was holding Ram close to her with so much love.

King Dasharath felt joy like he had never felt before, and Kaushalya had never seemed more invaluable to him as she was now as the mother of his first son. He squeezed her hand in gratitude before his son was at last placed in his arms. Holding the baby made further thought impossible. Dasarath became so enraptured by Ram that he failed to notice that Kaikeyi and Sumitra were also escorted to the birth room, or that night had fallen, or that Kaushalya had fallen asleep by his side.



Morning time

Ram and Lakshman were lying on Ram's bed, breathing softly. Perhaps this would be the last morning Kaushalya would have to admire her sleeping children because the boys were to begin their training as young princes and warriors. She hoped they would still be allowed to play sometimes—they were still children after all—but less mischief certainly would be a relief.

When Sumitra came for Lakshman, she laughed quietly seeing how he clasped a toy arrow to his chest.

“Even though Shatrugna is Lakshman's twin brother, at heart I think these two boys are the real twins,” Sumitra remarked, moving a stray curl from Lakshman's face.

The two mothers then spoke, as they often had in the past, about how the boys bonded, one with another. Lakshman and Ram were inseparable and so were Bharat and Shatrugna. However, even though Ram was elder to them by only a few hours, the three younger ones were in awe of Ram and watched carefully whatever he did. It was only recently that they had stopped imitating him or doing whatever he did. Now with their training about to commence, all four would become princes in their own right.



Ramachandra

In Ayodhya, King Dasharath had become the proud father of four sons. Kaushalya's Ram was his first-born, and Kaikeyi's son Bharat was his second. Sumitra had delivered twins who were named Lakshman and Shatrugna.

All the boys seemed to have taken the very best from their parents and the palace was alive with the sounds they made. Ram, especially, always had a large crowd of admirers, women of the palace who pulled his cheeks and fought to hold him and kiss him. From his birth, he outshone his brothers in all undertakings, whether in shooting arrows or charming their mothers. He had such natural grace that there was no jealousy among the brothers.

Vasishta had rightly named him Ramachandra, for, like the moon, his soothing presence pleased every person.



The four brothers

The brothers' early years passed like a whirlwind. The moment Ram and his brothers grasped how to use their arms and legs, they recklessly ran around the palace on chubby legs, tripping over maidservants and into a mother's saving arms. The royal gardens were a perfect playground filled with huge trees of various kinds to climb in or hide behind, streams, fountains, and tame animals.

The brothers exhausted themselves every day, inventing games and running around. Yet each day they woke up with renewed enthusiasm to explore and play.





Mantara

One, if not all, of the queens would keep an eye on the boys, and Kaikeyi often brought her favorite attendant, Mantara, with her. Mantara's only friend was Kaikeyi, and she did not conceal the dislike she had towards most people.

“Mantara!” Kaikeyi called out. “Come get the boys inside and cleaned-up while I go to change.”

As Mantara approached the boys, she was bombarded with a torrent of mud-balls.

“You would never torment me like this if I were not so ugly!” the mud-covered Mantara yelled. The boys froze at her words. They had never borne malice toward anyone and were genuinely startled by her outburst.

“No, no, we would have thrown the mud even if you were the most beautiful,” Ram reassured her, while taking her hand and wiping mud off her cheek.

Mantara snatched her hand away and sneered at the boy, even though Kaikeyi, who easily fit into the “most beautiful” category, was also covered in mud. Kaikeyi hastened to intervene and pulled Mantara away with her. Mantara stared back at Ram hatefully, as if he had thrown all the mud single-handedly.

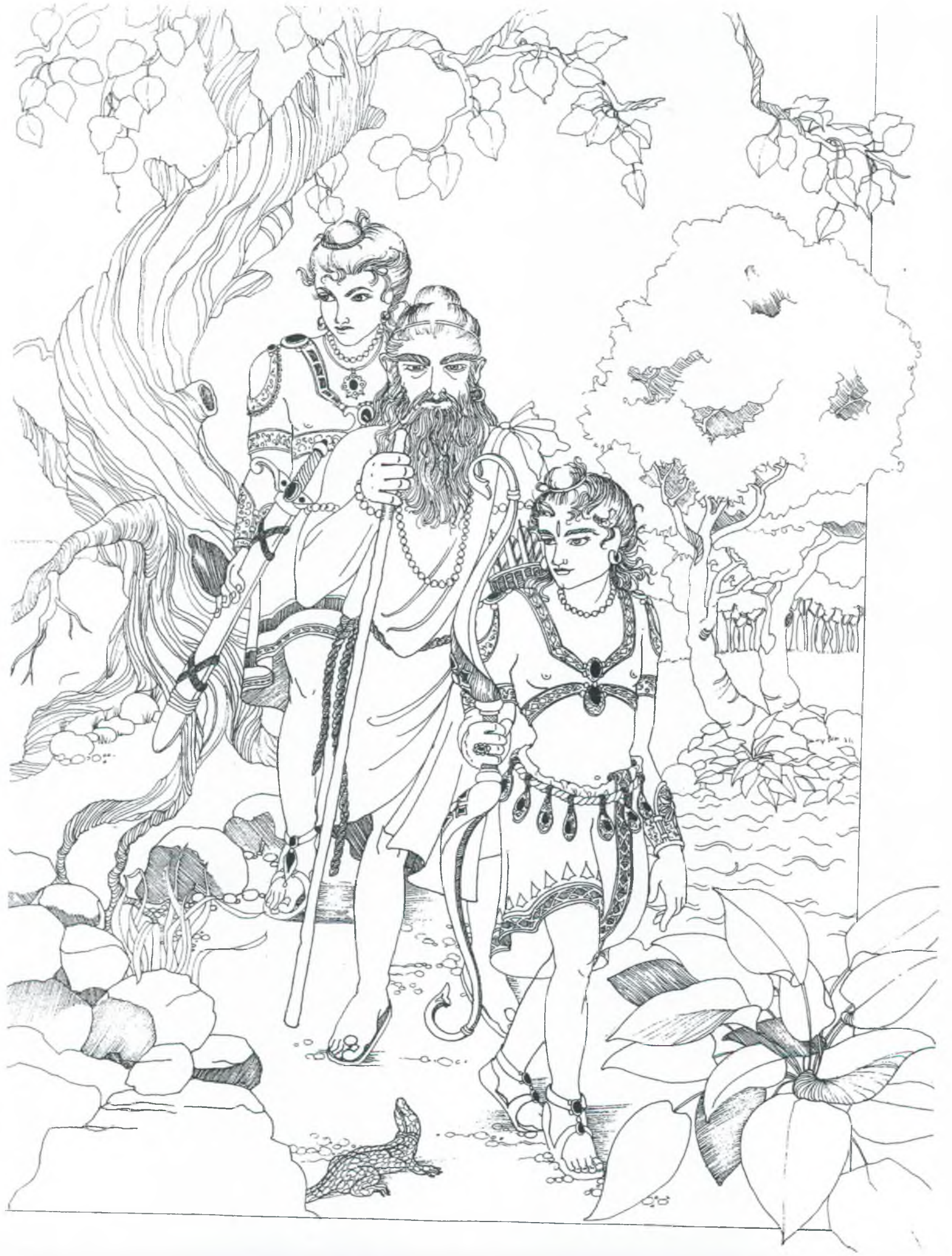


Vishvamitra, Ram and Lakshman

Time passed quickly, as it always does when happiness is abundant. King Dasarath was shocked to discover that Ram was too large to sit on his lap anymore. He realized that the time had come to think of suitable wives for his sons.

However, Vishvamitra, who was known for his volatile temper, appeared at the palace asking for Ram. He wanted Ram to protect his sacrifices from Ravana's demons, Marichi and Subahu. King Dasharath fainted in fear. He relented only when Vasishtha, the family-priest, assured him that Ram would be safe with Vishvamitra. Ram could only benefit from the association with the venerable sage. Moreover, Vishvamitra promised to bring Ram back within ten days.

It was the first time that Ram and Lakshman were out from the city-premises. Vishvamitra walked ahead as their guide, and the two boys silently followed. They walked barefoot along the River Sarayu resting only as night fell. The next morning they crossed the holy River Ganga.



Tataka

On the southern bank of the Ganga, the land was barren and dried up, and when one of the mountains on their path started moving, Ram and Lakshman gasped. They had never seen anything so appalling as this. This humanoid mountain could speak, had eyes, nose and mouth and, on closer scrutiny, seemed to have other humanlike body parts as well. The demoness was coming toward them, its mouth wide-open and arms waving furiously.

“Ram, kill this demoness Tataka,” Vishvamitra barked. “O mighty prince, to kill a woman pure at heart is indeed a great sin but to think of this monster as a woman is sheer folly and cowardice. A monster has no gender; it is an abomination. To be patient with her is not a virtue. Keeping these facts in mind and to unburden the earth, I order you to kill Tataka.”

Ram had listened intently to the sage’s words while remaining alert to Tataka’s advances. With the same speed that he shot his arrows, he weighed the arguments and instantly accepted their judiciousness.

His sharp arrow flew straight into Tataka’s black heart. She fell to the ground with a crash and a final scream as her life escaped her hideous body.

The trio left the place amid heavenly showers of flowers.



Protecting the Sacrifice

The sacrifice started as soon as the three arrived in Vishvamitra's ashram. Nothing interfered with the sacrifice that day or for several thereafter. Six days passed with no sign of disturbance. The sacrifice was blazing gloriously and mantras poured out, along with ladle upon ladle of clarified butter. Ram and Lakshman remained on constant alert, but the sky was clouded only by smoke from the fire pit. No demons were sighted. On the sixth day, the sacrifice was drawing to a close.

It was then that the cunning demons made their presence known through cackling laughter and cracking noises, louder than thunder. The only sign the sages showed of acknowledging that they were under attack was to chant louder.

"Lakshman, beware!" Ram called out, as he placed his first arrow against the bow.

Marichi and Subahu bared their fangs and prepared to pounce on Ram and Lakshman. Their flaming red hair whirled through the air as they descended from the clouds. Ram's arrows defeated them both. All the demons were victims of Ram and Lakshman's sharp arrows, and the sacrifice was successfully completed.

Vishvamitra was very pleased with Ram and Lakshman's capable handling of the ferocious demons.



Sita on a swing

Sitting on a swing in the palace-garden with her friends nearby, she looked like a lotus about to bloom. Her long black hair lay in waves around her shoulders and hips; her eyes were unbelievably large and deep, sparkling, and exquisite with their thick eyelashes curling up and framing their almond outline. Her mouth was as red and full as a ripe berry. If Lord Brahma, the creator, was asked to create another like her, he would have to say no, for he had used all his tricks in making this girl. Celestial damsels like Menaka and Urvashi, themselves paragons of beauty and the inspiration of poets, would bow their heads in shame on seeing the stirring loveliness Sita possessed. Her skin was so fair that one would be afraid to touch her, and the rosy blush on her cheeks resembled the color of sunset through a pure white cloud.

Who could match her in beauty and grace?



United Lovers

King Janaka welcomed Vishvamitra and the two princes warmly. When Vishvamitra encouraged Ram to lift the bow, Ram touched Vishvamitra's feet before he approached the massive bow. The young prince walked slowly around the bow. The people in attendance watched his every move. Ram closed his eyes and was praying, hands palm to palm. When he opened his eyes, his hand slid under the bow and lifted it up in one swift motion. Anyone slightly inattentive would have missed the feat. Everyone gasped, even Vishvamitra and Lakshman,

Ram stood the bow upright, leaning one tip on the floor. The bow was so large he had to stand on his toes to reach the other end of it. The old wood creaked as he shaped it to his will. Slowly it bent, Ram's muscles flexing to bring it into a proper shape. The bow was nearing a perfect arch when suddenly it exploded. The earth almost shook with the explosion, or so it seemed to the people in attendance.

"Bring Sita!" King Janaka called joyfully to his servants. "Adorn her as befits a princess and let her come with a garland in hand."

King Janaka led his blushing daughter towards Ram. Her delicate fingers trembled slightly as she placed the garland around his neck, making him her lord. Whatever emotion was swirling in her she saw mirrored in him. After a long separation, the eternal lovers, Vishnu and Lakshmi were re-united.

Flower petals showered from every direction - the bow was broken and their princess would marry! On the wedding day, King Janaka placed Sita's fair hand into Ram's dark one, and as they circumambulated the fire, their union was sealed. Neither of them knew what hardships were in store for them, and they sat side by side brimming with love and happiness.

