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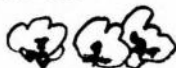
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As the animals crunched noisily, they grew heavier and heavier. Gradually, they settled to the ground and stood quietly.

"Saints alive! My biscuit experiment worked!" Mr. George took off the ropes, strings, and clothesline and hung them in the barn.

On his way out, he absent-mindedly grabbed a handful of popcorn. Immediately, the animals tried to warn him, "Moo, moo, oink, oink, squawk, squawk."

Farmer George did not hear for he was sailing higher, and higher, and higher. . ."



VIJAYA and the SEVEN HUNDRED FIND LANKA

by
S. Dorman

Vijaya was rolling on the sea with seven hundred of his followers in seven sickle-shaped, hemp-bound reed ships. Vijaya was a Sinhalese prince, the son of Sinhabāhu who had the paws of a lion for hands and feet because he was the son of Sinhala the lion. Vijaya was half-shaven; the right side of his head had been shaved by his father as a sign of disgrace. The ocean wind lifted the long dark remains of his hair, swirling them about his face. The sea was white-capped and deep, and Vijaya leaned on a bamboo rail staring unhappily at the water.

He and the Seven Hundred had been turned out to sea from Gujarāt many months before in order to placate the wrath of his father's subjects. The unruly behavior and violent play of the prince and his male followers had disrupted the kingdom. Vijaya wondered at his father's intolerance and hypocrisy, for Sinhabāhu had also been violent in his youth. In fact, he had slain his own father, the lion Sinhala! Yet remembrance of this had not been enough to help him ignore the demands of his people.

"Send the prince away reproached!" Their clangor still rang in Vijaya's ears, causing him to wince even now.

Just then his captain Sena came over to him carrying a brass ladle full of water. Sena's head (like those of all the Seven Hundred) was also half-shaven, and he wore his remaining hair in a plait that trailed over his shoulder.

His black eyes showed concern. "Trouble roils your spirit, Prince."

Overhead the changing wind smacked the square-rigged cotton sail, flapping it. After some moments, Vijaya answered, "I can't forget my humiliation."

Holding out the dipper of fresh water, Sena urged, "Sleep can abate grief. If you'll let it, the rocking ocean will lull your hurt."

Vijaya waved aside water and suggestion, and went astern to row. Relieving another of the long oar, he reclined on a grass mat in the curve of the stern, falling into sculling rhythm beside the young noble Gopura.

Bright was the day they found Lanka. The hot coppery sands stained red the hands of Vijaya and the Seven Hundred as they fell, exhausted, to shore. They made camp at the edge of the woods at Tambapanni where the sun stood over the high dim forest of palms.

Following his meal of lasuna peppered rice and fish, Vijaya heaved a contented sigh and stood. The silken air and scent of the land had

given him relief from his grief, renewing his will.

"Come, Sena, let's walk."

They tramped a mile through the woods before halting at a blue lake. Between the arms of the woods a flock of white pelicans, sailing low, fished the waters. To one side ebony and satinwood trees lined a hidden lagoon, which they entered. Conclaves of egrets nested there. And on the shoals fat dry crocodiles, jaws agape, sunned themselves and waited.

"This is truly a Resplendent Land," murmured Vijaya.

"What, Prince?" asked Sena, breaking from his own reverie.

"This place, Sena, shall be called Lanka henceforth. Here, if we can overcome its dangers, we shall start life anew."

They returned slowly to camp. As they drew near, the god Upulvan, hidden in the simple form of a wandering ascetic, approached them through the trees.

The little ascetic bowed humbly and took up Vijaya's wrists. He held them together palm to palm and wound the hands with khoma thread. "I bind your hands to strengthen you in temptation. Now you are sealed against it as long as you will." The seeming ascetic looked up at him and smiled. In his smile was a sparkling well from which the spirit of Vijaya drank thirstily. Then the ascetic vanished and so did the thread, yet Vijaya felt its binding still.

"Did you see that, Sena?!" He turned to his friend.

But just then a skinny dun-colored bitch came bounding through the spindly palm trunks.

"Look, Leader. A pariah!"

By now some of the other followers, having seen them returning, came close to look at the dog.

"This means civilization is near," someone shouted.

And another suggested, "Let's follow the dog and see where it leads!"

"No doubt to the house of a noble!" exclaimed yet a third.

But Vijaya sensed something amiss and said firmly that they should not go after it.

So all returned to their camps except Mīta, who went following after the bitch. Through Lanka he went over limestone and bog; over deadfall and stream he sprang. Not a sign of humanity did he see. Mile after mile he followed the dog until presently it began to bay.

Deep in the forest there was a glen where Kuveni the sorceress sat under a banyan tree, spinning. She smiled faintly when she heard the cry of the returning dog. Both dog and Kuveni were demons in disguise. They planned to destroy Vijaya and eat the Seven Hundred.

The animal shot between the down-growing branches of the banyan and lighted on a great crystal of quartz, grinning.

Mitta loped into the glen and beheld the sight of Kuveni the beautiful, spinning koseyya and singing. A pond sat silent beside the tree. Silken thread trailing from the distaff gleamed prettily in the afternoon light, and the damsel smiled at him. *I'm lovely, come*, she seemed to invite. Spellbound, Mitta proceeded.

When he came close, Kuveni rose swiftly in anger for she recognized the god Upulvan's seal already on him because he was under Vijaya's authority. Therefore she could not yet devour him. Rapacious fires roared in her eyes as she seized him by the throat and threw him into the chasm beneath the waters of the pond. Down he sank without a cry.

Kuveni straightened her sari and glared at the bitch who took off through the banyan branches to gather more men. Then the seeming woman sank back against the thick yellow-green trunk, muttering against Upulvan.

The pariah returned to the camps, this time luring Kula the huntsman away.

Thus, one by one, six hundred and ninety-nine went astray from the commandment of Vijaya, until only Gopura --whose name means gate-tower-- was left with him. Together they watched Sena disappear between the king coconuts.

"So...Gopura. Only you and I are left while the others go, day and night, to find what they may. What is it they want that causes them to follow a bitch instead of me?" But he understood the weakness of their flesh.

"I am true to my name," boasted Gopura. "Though Sena and all the others go, I won't, Leader."

"We'll see," said Vijaya.

It was night when Vijaya threw a crimson kambala around his shoulders for warmth, and, leaving the fire, started off through the seasonal forest in search of his seven hundred compatriots. His dignity was gracefully expressed as he traveled noiselessly through the dark strange web-work of Lanka. Only the small and wakeful great-eyed loris noted his passing.

Meanwhile, Kuveni had an abyss full of paralyzed men but needed one more --the sum of all-- in order to break apart the protection of Upulvan and eat them. She sat in the opalescent night trusting the dog to return with Vijaya. Kuveni begrudged sharing the men with the other demon so she occupied her moments in thinking how to do the dog out of its meal.

When the pariah crossed Vijaya's path he followed her to the glen. Entering there he took in the sight: the grinning dog, Kuveni spinning, the moon in the pool. The woman was desirable, but the approach to the water was thoroughly trampled. Wondering who she was, Vijaya tried the spirit of the smiling woman against that of the wandering ascetic, and found it specious.

Taking his hesitation as an evil sign, she jumped up. But he sprang to the offense, taking her by the hair. Winding his fist in the tresses he pressed upon her skull. Thus the seal of



Upulvan upon his hands prevented her spirit from exiting its temporary abode.

"Spit up my men, witch, lest I send you where you would not go."

Kuveni yielded to the prince's straightened will, saying coldly to the dog, "Go, bitch; let the water out of my sink."

With its tail 'twixt its legs, the dog descended a hole between the roots of the banyan tree, returning not again. Moments later the water in the pool began draining with great suction to reveal bodies piled to the rim of the chasm. Kuveni uttered a few words in the fore-tongue of Chingulays. Immediately the men on top, Sena and Gopura among them, revived and clambered out. Each successive layer followed, with the men at the bottom taking footholds in

the rock fissures and tree roots to reach the berm. At last Mitta stood on the bank beside the empty pond.

One by one they approached the prince and kissed his free hand in gratitude very pleasing to witness.

Vijaya sternly reproved the sorceress and admonished her to repent.

"Can a demon repent?" she asked, where upon the puzzled prince released her hair. She vanished.

Between the glen and the sea, the wild animals of Lanka woke and scattered before the great return of Vijaya and the Seven Hundred.

WOFUS

by
Deborah L. Hunt

He woke beneath the pile of cold leaves, his dragon body stretched on the ground. Wind carried through the tree branches far above him. He flexed his eyelids open and lifted the small weight of his head. Leaves fell from his scales. Slowly, he lumbered over to a rock, the barb on his tail swinging outward, and he dropped his head to rest on the rock.

Gnarled twisted oaks and piles of leaves lay scattered around him. Drippings of mud and moss stained the tree trunks and rocks. The wind died back down to silence. There was no movement he could see. He was alone.

He knew he had been here beneath the leaves, but that was all he could remember of himself. He didn't know where he was at, or how he had come to wake here, or what he would do next.

Sunlight broke through the high canopy of leaves and pierced the dimness. More of the woods could be seen. And there was a sensation that he couldn't make out. It was as though the wood's silence crept through the cold he liked and burned with a tingling in his mind.

Beyond the tingling, he sensed other images. They were looming shapes, cutting out the sunlight as they flew, but they had no trace of the woods in them that he felt in himself. The images lay elsewhere, distances away, and somehow he belonged to them, just as he felt he belonged to that tingling.

In the wood's distance he caught sight of a slow green brown movement along the ground. He felt no need to move to avoid it. The troubling thoughts were enough to keep him there, wrapped up in his confusion and misery.

As it came closer to him, he saw that it had black eyes and a sharp mouth. He stared at the smallish turtle, which was weathered almost beyond recognition as a turtle. The turtle looked at him and paused. From somewhere in the midst of his head, he heard a voice. It was the turtle's. The impact startled him. He hadn't known that it could communicate with him. He eyed the turtle with apprehension.

"Well, by the looks of you, you should be a dragon," the turtle spoke, its voice filled with a critical contempt.

"Can you speak?"

He kept staring at the turtle, feeling more confusion. He had no idea how to speak to it.

"I suppose that dragons are one of the stupider animals, though I hadn't thought so before. Are you at least enchanted?"

He had no idea what enchanted meant. The turtle crawled closer. Leaves and mud were caked on it. It smelled of rotten earth. A yellow mottled spot was on its neck. Beyond the filth and smell, though, its eyes had a friendliness. It must have sensed his lack of knowledge for it went on speaking.

"Blood and bones, earth and stones. The soul of the forest, Denolap, in the souls of the few enchanted blessings."

The words made little sense in the chaos of his mind. The turtle eyed him further. Then as slowly as it had come, it began to crawl off. He knew that he liked this turtle and that it was leaving because he couldn't communicate with it.

The turtle arched back its head to look at him and spoke.

"The grass at the mire has grown tender enough for eating. If you want you can come along. You can come back to your rock later, if you wish."

Then it moved on. He watched after it and decided to follow it. The turtle made an easy path between the tangles of bracken and nettles. He lumbered after it, keeping a distance between them.

The mire was down a slope from where he had been. Black mud claimed the ground. When the turtle approached the mud, he held back. The wetness there made his outside crawl with a sensation he didn't like, so he found another rock and watched the turtle from there.

The turtle sank to its shell at the mire's edge. After a few chops of grass, the turtle looked back to him at the rock.

"Well, you must have at least understood me if you followed. Perhaps dragons are stupid creatures after all."

The turtle regarded him further.

"Whether you were born here or not, you certainly are a dragon -- wings, fangs, and all."