

Renu and the monster: a story for Divali

A Hindu story

Key ideas: Divali, Rama and Sita, light

Her heart pounding, little Renu pulled the bedclothes right over her face and drew her knees up under her chin. 'When I look again,' she told herself, 'the monster will be gone.' She edged the blankets down until she could see with one eye. The monster was still there, black and menacing, crouching in the corner of her room! She could tell it was getting ready to pounce on her! Then she lost her nerve. 'Help!' she shrieked. 'Go away! GO AWAY!'

The door flew open and the room was filled with light. 'What's the matter dear?' It was the soothing voice of her grandmother. Renu was about to point to the monster, but she saw that it was only her dressing gown, thrown over her bookcase. Her grandmother sat down on the bed and took Renu's hand in her own. 'You know, the dark has always tried to frighten us. But in the end, the light always wins. It has been so, ever since Prince Rama killed the wicked Ravana.' And Renu knew she was going to hear her favourite story, as only her grandmother could tell it.

'Long ago,' she began, 'there lived a brave prince called Rama. His stepmother forced him to leave home with his beautiful wife, Sita and they went away to live in the forest for fourteen long years. Now in the forest there also lived a hideous monster with ten heads. He was called Ravana – and he was almost as frightening,' added Renu's grandmother with a smile, 'as your dressing gown!'

'Well, one day, when Rama was out hunting, Ravana disguised himself as an old beggar and persuaded Sita to enter his castle. Once inside, he turned back into a monster, and told Sita he would never let her go. Rama was very worried about his wife, so he went to Hanuman, the King of the Monkeys, and asked for his help. The monkey army attacked Ravana's castle and after a terrible battle, they killed Ravana and rescued Sita. When Sita and Rama finally made the long journey home to become King and Queen, the people lit their way with little lamps called divas.'

'Ever since, we Hindus have given thanks for Rama's victory over Ravana in the wonderful festival of light we call Divali. We light our own divas, we turn on all the lights, and we celebrate with bonfires and fireworks.' Renu snuggled under the blankets again. 'Thank you grandma she said. 'I'm sure I'll be able to go to sleep now.'

'I hope so,' said her grandmother as she kissed Renu on the forehead. 'We've got a busy day tomorrow. Divali's almost here and we have to clean the whole house from top to bottom!' As she tiptoed from Renu's room she hung up her granddaughter's dressing gown on the hook behind the door. Just in case.

'And good night to you, too Ravana!' she whispered.

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