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Chapter 1

Bala Kanda

A long time ago in the kingdom of Ayodhya there lived a great king named Dasharatha. Though he had three beautiful queens, they remained childless. One day, King Dasharatha performed a powerful pooja, or prayer, asking the Gods in heaven for a child, an heir to the throne. In time, all three queens gave birth to sons. Prince Rama was born first to the eldest queen Kausalya, Prince Bharatha was born next to the second queen Kaikeyi, and twin brothers Lakshmana and Sathrugna were born to the youngest queen Sumitra. The entire kingdom rejoiced at the birth of four royal princes!

When the brothers were sixteen years old, Rama and Lakshmana were sent to further their education with the wise sage Vishwamitra. They were trained in martial arts, weaponry and courtly matters.

One day, sage Vishwamitra took the princes on a journey to Mithila kingdom where a swayamvaram ceremony was being held to find a suitable husband for Princess Sita. In the Mithila palace there was a magnificent bow said to belong to Lord Shiva himself. Any man who could lift this bow would win Sita's hand in marriage. Many men came from far and wide, but they all failed the test. Prince Rama easily lifted the bow, and broke it! The whole palace cheered for now their beloved Sita would be married to Rama. It is said that their wedding was celebrated for seven days and nights!



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Chapter 2

Ayodhya Kanda

Meanwhile, back in the kingdom of Ayodhya, King Dasharatha had aged and fallen gravely ill. The ailing king named Prince Rama as crown prince of Ayodhya. Now, queen Kaikeyi wanted her son Bharatha to be crown prince and the next ruler of Ayodhya.

Many years ago she had saved the king's life and he had promised her two boons, which she had yet to use. Kaikeyi asked the king to grant her the two wishes. First, she wanted her son Bharatha named as crown prince. Second, she wanted Rama to live in exile in the forest for fourteen years. Poor King Dasharatha had no choice but to honour his word and grant her the wishes.

And so it was that Rama and Sita left for the forest to live in exile, accompanied by Lakshmana who was ever loyal to his eldest brother. Very soon, the King died of a broken heart and Bharata was summoned to ascend the throne. However, Bharatha refused to accept the role of king for it rightfully belonged to the eldest son, Rama. Bharatha agreed to rule as a representative until Prince Rama returned from exile.



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Chapter 3

Aranya Kanda

Deep inside the Dandaka forest Rama, Sita and Lakshmana made a home for themselves and lived a simple life. The forest was plagued by terrifying rakshasa demons who caused trouble for the forest dwellers and holy men. The leader of all the rakshasas was Ravana, the terrible ten-headed demon king himself, who lived on the island of Lanka. One of the rakshasas described the beauty of the lovely Princess Sita to him. Overcome by desire, Ravana decided to make Sita his own.

Ravana enlisted the help of another rakshasa disguised as an adorable golden deer to attract Sita's attention. The moment Sita saw the shimmering deer she fell in love with it and asked Rama to capture the creature for her.

Before the men went off in search of the elusive golden deer, Lakshmana drew a white chalk circle around their hut. He warned Sita to stay indoors and not to step outside the circle of protection that he had drawn to keep her safe.

Ravana knew that Sita was all alone and so he disguised himself as a holy man and appeared outside the hut. He begged for some alms and managed to trick Sita into stepping outside the circle of protection. Immediately he resumed his rakshasa self and abducted Sita! He carried her off in his golden flying chariot, away from the forest.

As the chariot flew above the trees, Sita screamed and cried out for help. Her voice was heard by Jetayu, and old vulture bird. Jetayu and Ravana struggled together as the giant bird tried his best to save Sita. Ravana succeeded in cutting off the bird's wing and Jetayu fell from the skies. As the chariot flew further away, Sita removed her jewellery and threw her bangles, necklaces and rings to the forest floor, and left a trail for Rama to follow and find her.

Rama and Lakshmana soon realized that Sita had disappeared and they looked for her. They stumbled upon Jetayu as he breathed his last breath. The giant bird informed them that Sita had been taken by Ravana to his palace in Lanka. The two brothers embarked on a long journey in search of Sita.



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Chapter 4

Kishkinda Kanda

Rama and Lakshmana travelled southward as they searched for Sita. They entered the Kishkinda forest and met Sugriva the king of the monkeys. They also met the leader of the monkey army, the strong and brave Hanuman. The animals of the forest had heard about the two princes searching for Sita. Jambavan, the leader of the bears also offered his help. Soon, a large alliance was formed between the monkeys and bears, to help find Sita.

The army of animals marched all the way to the southernmost tip of India as they looked for Sita. When they reached the shore they saw the island of Lanka lying across the vast ocean. Ravana's palace was far away from them, and so was Sita. They did not have any means to cross the ocean and reach Lanka ...

At this point, Hanuman remembered the divine gifts he was blessed with as a child. The Gods had bestowed him with magical powers! Immediately Hanuman remembered how to fly and how to grow larger. Hanuman dived into the ocean and swam towards Lanka.

The bears and monkeys started to build a bridge made out of stones and rocks. All the animals gathered to help. The birds carried pebbles in their beaks. The squirrels lifted small stones. And even the spider pushed a grain of sand into the ocean. And in time, a stone bridge to Lanka took shape.



Chapter 5

Sundara Kanda

While he swam across the ocean, Hanuman encountered many adventures. The ocean was a dangerous place infested with strange creatures. One such monster was Surasa the demon-serpent who tried to attack Hanuman. The wily Hanuman decided to have fun with the creature! He shrank to the size of an ant and flew inside her nostrils and escaped from her mouth! He tormented the creature until she surrendered and swam away, defeated.

Finally Hanuman arrived at Lanka and made himself invisible while he explored the royal city and palace. He found poor Sita all alone in an ashoka tree grove, held captive by Ravana. Hanuman explained that he was her husband's messenger and showed her Rama's ring.

He assured her that Rama and his army were on their way to rescue her and she would soon be set free.

Before Hanuman returned to Rama and the army, he proceeded to wreak havoc in Lanka and cause some mayhem by being a nuisance. The royal guards captured him and brought him before Ravana, the king of Lanka. His punishment was to have his tail set on fire! Of course, Hanuman used his magic powers and made his tail grow longer and longer while he jumped and leaped all over the palace and city setting fire to all of Lanka. Finally he doused his tail in the sea and returned to Rama with the good news that Sita had been found, safe and unharmed.



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Chapter 6

Yuddha Kanda

Soon, Ravana heard the news of the stone bridge and Rama's army advancing to Lanka. Ravana assembled his strongest and greatest warriors together with an army of rakshasas as he prepared for a great attack.

A terrible battle ensued between Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Jambavan, Hanuman, the bears and monkeys as they bravely fought the rakshasa army. During the clash of warriors, Lakshmana was mortally wounded and he lay dying on the battlefield. Hanuman was told by a wise monkey to go to Mount Kailash and find the special healing herb sanjeevani that could revive Lakshmana. Hanuman flew off to the mountain but was unable to distinguish the sanjeevani herb amongst all the plants.

And so it was that the great Hanuman lifted the peak of the mountain with the plants growing upon it and flew back to the battlefield. Not only was Lakshmana revived, but the fragrance of the herb healed the other wounded bears and monkeys as well.

In the middle of the bloodshed, a duel took place between Rama and Ravana. Every time Rama cut off one of Ravana's ten heads, a new head sprouted in its place. Every weapon aimed at Ravana fell to the ground without harming the rakshasa king. The battle went on for days and nights. Finally, Rama prayed to the Gods in heaven before he let fly an arrow from his bow. The arrow pierced Ravana's chest and the great rakshasa king fell to the ground, dead.

The battle was over and Sita was finally reunited with Rama! There was so much rejoicing and happiness that flowers fell from the heavens above to celebrate the victory of Rama over Ravana.

Hanuman pledged his allegiance to Rama and together with Sita and Lakshmana, they returned to Ayodhya. The people of Ayodhya had waited for years for their crown prince to come back home and ascend the throne. Upon news of Rama's triumph over Ravana and their return journey to Ayodhya, the kingdom prepared to receive the victors. The people lit oil lamps and placed them on the edge of the forest leading all the way to the palace, as a bright pathway to guide them in the dark.

THE END

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