THE COMPLETE RAMAYANA

BOOK 4

RAMA
MEETS SUGRIVA

PARO ANAND

juggernaut

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To Chiki Sarkar,
who knew I could do this, though I didn't.

And to Keshav,
whose love gave me the confidence
to take the leap.

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RAMA'S MOMENT OF DOUBT

Rama and Lakshmana had been advised by Danu, whom they had released from his rakshasa form, to search for Sugriva, the king of the vanaras (monkeys). They had been told that he was both capable and eager to assist in the mission to find and rescue Sita.

Footsore and fatigued, they reached the base of the mighty Rishyamukha, where he resided. They prepared to ascend the holy mountain in search of the group of five monkeys. Staring at the enormous mountain, Rama was consumed

by self-doubt. Try as he might, he could not see the peak, shrouded by mist and clouds. The task ahead seemed too difficult, even for someone as powerful as Rama.

Rama's legs gave way, and he sank to the ground. Hearing his pained sigh, Lakshmana turned back in alarm and rushed to his side. But Rama shook his head. 'I cannot go on. All hope has left me, and I do not have the strength to take another step. Leave me here, brother, and continue the search for Sita. Tell her I loved her dearly but failed in my duty to her.'

Shocked by his words, Lakshmana put an arm under Rama's shoulder and tried to bring him to his feet. He reminded him of Sita's grace and of her great love for her husband.

'She could have lived a life of great luxury in Ayodhya, brother,' he reminded Rama. 'Kaikeyi's demand did not include Sita's exile. But her love and sense of duty towards you would not let her abandon your side. She



sacrificed all her familiar comforts to accompany you into hardship and danger. How, then, can you now forsake her when she is facing the most difficult time of her life?'

Rama lifted his head and looked at his brother with affection and admiration. But his feet did not move. So Lakshmana pressed on, hoping his words would spur Rama into action.

'Think of how you won her, Rama. You and only you were befitting – not only to lift but also to break the mighty bow at her swayamvara. Do you not remember that Ravana had also arrived at the ceremony? Recall how Sita's face flinched as he walked towards the bow, how she closed her eyes, praying that the demon king would fail. How deeply she did not want to be with him! And when you arrived, she leant forward with an eagerness she could not control.'

The moments appeared vividly before Rama, as Lakshmana reminded him of more.