

**The Ramayana of Valmiki**  
**Translated into English Verse by**  
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[The young Rama, prince of Ayodha, meets his future wife, Sita, at a ceremony organized by her father, Janak, the king of Mithila. Janak challenges all Sita's suitors to string a "heavenly bow," but only Rama can bend it, string it, and even break it, marking him as Sita's intended.]

Canto LXVI. Janak's Speech.

With cloudless lustre rose the sun;  
The king, his morning worship done,  
Ordered his heralds to invite  
The princes and the anchorite.  
With honour, as the laws decree,  
The monarch entertained the three.  
Then to the youths and saintly man  
Videha's lord this speech began:  
"O blameless Saint, most welcome thou!  
If I may please thee tell me how.  
Speak, mighty lord, whom all revere,  
'Tis thine to order, mine to hear."

Thus he on mighty thoughts intent;  
Then thus the sage most eloquent:  
"King Dasaratha's sons, this pair  
Of warriors famous everywhere,  
Are come that best of bows to see  
That lies a treasure stored by thee.  
This, mighty Janak, deign to show,  
That they may look upon the bow,  
And then, contented, homeward go."  
Then royal Janak spoke in turn:  
"O best of Saints, the story learn  
Why this famed bow, a noble prize,  
A treasure in my palace lies.  
A monarch, Devarat by name,  
Who sixth from ancient Nimi came,  
Held it as ruler of the land,  
A pledge in his successive hand.  
This bow the mighty Rudra bore  
At Daksha's sacrifice of yore,  
When carnage of the Immortals stained  
The rite that Daksha had ordained.  
Then as the Gods sore wounded fled,  
Victorious Rudra, mocking, said:  
"Because, O Gods, ye gave me naught  
When I my rightful portion sought,  
Your dearest parts I will not spare,  
But with my bow your frames will tear."

The Sons of Heaven, in wild alarm,  
Soft flatteries tried his rage to charm.  
Then Bhava, Lord whom Gods adore,  
Grew kind and friendly as before,  
And every torn and mangled limb  
Was safe and sound restored by him.  
Thenceforth this bow, the gem of bows,  
That freed the God of Gods from foes,  
Stored by our great forefathers lay  
A treasure and a pride for aye.  
Once, as it chanced, I ploughed the ground,  
When sudden, 'neath the share was found  
An infant springing from the earth,  
Named Sita from her secret birth.  
In strength and grace the maiden grew,  
My cherished daughter, fair to view.  
I vowed her, of no mortal birth,  
Meet prize for noblest hero's worth.  
In strength and grace the maiden grew,  
And many a monarch came to woo.  
To all the princely suitors I  
Gave, mighty Saint, the same reply:  
"I give not thus my daughter, she  
Prize of heroic worth shall be.  
To Mithila the suitors pressed  
Their power and might to manifest.  
To all who came with hearts aglow  
I offered Siva's wondrous bow.  
Not one of all the royal band  
Could raise or take the bow in hand.  
The suitors' puny might I spurned,  
And back the feeble princes turned.  
Enraged thereat, the warriors met,  
With force combined my town beset.  
Stung to the heart with scorn and shame,  
With war and threats they madly came,  
Besieged my peaceful walls, and long  
To Mithila did grievous wrong.  
There, wasting all, a year they lay,  
And brought my treasures to decay,  
Filling my soul, O Hermit chief,  
With bitter woe and hopeless grief.  
At last by long-wrought penance I  
Won favour with the Gods on high,  
Who with my labours well content  
A four-fold host to aid me sent.  
Then swift the baffled heroes fled  
To all the winds discomfited--

Wrong-doers, with their lords and host,  
And all their valour's idle boast.  
This heavenly bow, exceeding bright,  
These youths shall see, O Anchorite.  
Then if young Rama's hand can string  
The bow that baffled lord and king,  
To him I give, as I have sworn,  
My Sita, not of woman born."

#### Canto LXVII. The Breaking Of The Bow.

Then spoke again the great recluse:  
"This mighty bow, O King, produce."  
King Janak, at the saint's request,  
This order to his train addressed:  
"Let the great bow be hither borne,  
Which flowery wreaths and scents adorn."  
Soon as the monarch's words were said,  
His servants to the city sped,  
Five thousand youths in number, all  
Of manly strength and stature tall,  
The ponderous eight-wheeled chest that held  
The heavenly bow, with toil propelled.  
At length they brought that iron chest,  
And thus the godlike king addressed:  
"This best of bows, O lord, we bring,  
Respected by each chief and king,  
And place it for these youths to see,  
If, Sovereign, such thy pleasure be."

With suppliant palm to palm applied  
King Janak to the strangers cried:  
"This gem of bows, O Brahman Sage,  
Our race has prized from age to age,  
Too strong for those who yet have reigned,  
Though great in might each nerve they  
strained.  
Titan and fiend its strength defies,  
God, spirit, minstrel of the skies.  
And bard above and snake below  
Are baffled by this glorious bow.  
Then how may human prowess hope  
With such a bow as this to cope?  
What man with valour's choicest gift  
This bow can draw, or string, or lift?  
Yet let the princes, holy Seer,  
Behold it: it is present here."

Then spoke the hermit pious-souled:  
"Rama, dear son, the bow behold."  
Then Rama at his word unclosed  
The chest wherein its might reposed,  
Thus crying, as he viewed it: "Lo!

I lay mine hand upon the bow:  
May happy luck my hope attend  
Its heavenly strength to lift or bend."  
"Good luck be thine," the hermit cried:  
"Assay the task!" the king replied.  
Then Raghu's son, as if in sport,  
Before the thousands of the court,  
The weapon by the middle raised  
That all the crowd in wonder gazed.  
With steady arm the string he drew  
Till burst the mighty bow in two.  
As snapped the bow, an awful clang,  
Loud as the shriek of tempests, rang.  
The earth, affrighted, shook amain  
As when a hill is rent in twain.  
Then, senseless at the fearful sound,  
The people fell upon the ground:  
None save the king, the princely pair,  
And the great saint, the shock could bear.

When woke to sense the stricken train,  
And Janak's soul was calm again,  
With suppliant hands and reverent head,  
These words, most eloquent, he said:  
"O Saint, Prince Rama stands alone:  
His peerless might he well has shown.  
A marvel has the hero wrought  
Beyond belief, surpassing thought.  
My child, to royal Rama wed,  
New glory on our line will shed:  
And true my promise will remain  
That hero's worth the bride should gain.  
Dearer to me than light and life,  
My Sita shall be Rama's wife.  
If thou, O Brahman, leave concede,  
My counsellors, with eager speed,  
Borne in their flying cars, to fair  
Ayodhya's town the news shall bear,  
With courteous message to entreat  
The king to grace my royal seat.  
This to the monarch shall they tell,  
The bride is his who won her well:  
And his two sons are resting here  
Protected by the holy seer.  
So, at his pleasure, let them lead  
The sovereign to my town with speed."

The hermit to his prayer inclined  
And Janak, lord of virtuous mind,  
With charges, to Ayodhya sent  
His ministers: and forth they went.