

That Sunday Morning

My father was posted in Patna. On the first Sunday there, my brother and I decided to do a little exploring on our bikes. It was still very early in the morning, and only a few people were about. The roads were good and the trees lining them were shady. There were no imposing buildings or monuments as there are in Delhi, from where we had just come. After cycling for about half-an-hour, my brother got bored and said, "Come on, I'll race you to that corner. The loser treats the other to a chocolate, okay?"

"Okay, one, two, three!" I said, and then we were off.

This was not the first time we had raced. Only my brother had invariably beaten me and then crowed about it for days. I was determined to win this time. I pedalled as fast as I could. My legs ached and my skirt billowed out, threatening to hit my face. The trees on either side of the road had become one green blur. My hair blew behind me and my lungs were bursting for air. Soon I drew level with my brother and then gradually I moved ahead. I could see the corner, in a haze. I was

starting to whoop with glee, but the whoop froze on my lips. There, right in the middle of the road, stood a lone cow!

I jammed on the brakes and the cycle stopped abruptly, but I could not stop the momentum of my own body. I flew over the handlebars and landed smack on the back of the unfortunate animal. The cow, startled by this sudden attack, reared up and started running. I clung to her for dear Me, as she charged up the road and round the corner.

As we turned, I spotted two rows of resplendent Cavalry officers, mounted on their magnificent horses coming towards us. They obviously belonged to the governor's bodyguard. I could only cling helplessly as the frightened cow charged straight at the horses. The horses panicked and scattered. There was a regular stampede. The cow managed to fall into a ditch and in the process, dislodged me, and I landed on the soft earth bordering the ditch. I sat up with a groan and saw that the Cavalry horses were still out of control. Some of them were running like mad in circles, while their riders tried to bring them under control. Two horses were nowhere to be seen, and one horse threw its rider right in front of my eyes. The poor man landed in the ditch just next to the cow. The cow thinking this was another attack, bellowed loudly and, lowering its head, charged



at the unfortunate man. The poor fellow scrambled out of the ditch, tearing his pants at rather an awkward place. Realising this, he sat down on the road with a thump and would not get up.

I saw my brother approaching with my bike in tow, coming up to me with a grin on his face. I felt like hitting him.

"You looked such a sight on top of that cow," he said and started laughing. Then he probably realised that I might have been hurt and asked, "Are you all right?"

"Of course, I am," I said haughtily and got up at once. Nothing on earth would have made me admit to him how frightened and shaken I was.

Just then my brother spotted one of the horse-riders coming towards us with a thunderous scowl on his face. Behind him was the man to whom, in all probability, the cow belonged. My brother gave them an uneasy glance and said, "I think it would be nice if we moved quickly from here." I looked round and saw that if both of us did not move fast enough, we would be called in for a lot of explanations. With one accord we got onto our bikes and beat a hasty retreat.

The morning had already been rather eventful and we did not want to add another unpleasant episode to it.