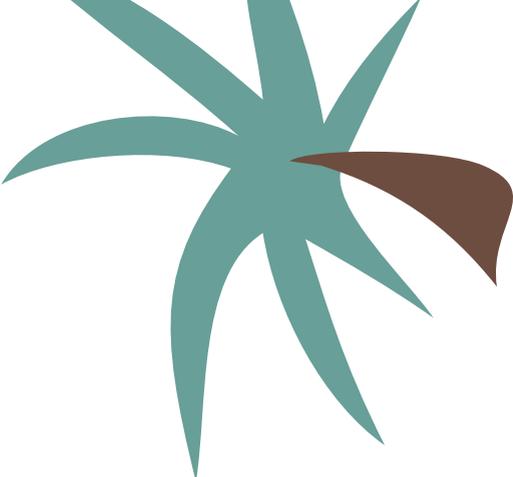


THE BROKEN BULLOCK CART



WRITTEN BY KERSIE KHAMBATTA
ILLUSTRATED BY EVA BRICHAU



THE BROKEN BULLOCK CART

Story by
KERSIE KHAMBATTA

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EVA BRICHAU



Sunil crawled on all fours into the dry haystack, looking for his lost brown puppy. His outstretched hand touched something hard. He pushed the haystack aside irritably, and found a broken bullock cart. He tried to drag it out, but it was too heavy. He went to his father for help.



His father was working in the small field he leased from the village landlord. He was tall, skinny, with a weather-beaten face, wearing a dirty dhoti which had once been white. "You found a broken bullock cart? So?" he mumbled, with paan in his mouth.



"If we put the wheels back on, it will work," said Sunil.

"And then? What do we do with it, eh? Are you going to pull it? We don't have bullocks, you know."

"We can borrow them," replied Sunil.

"And then...do what?"

"We can run it in the bullock cart races in Shivrampur," said Sunil.

"Oh, go away. I'm busy."

Sunil sat down heavily on the ground, disappointed. He had heard that the prize money for the winner at the races was one thousand rupees. That was a lot of money. It would help his father pay off the debt he owed a moneylender. He knew his father was very worried. The moneylender constantly harassed him.



Sunil had just one sister. His mother was frail, and frequently fell ill from the hard work she had to do. She cooked, cleaned, helped in the field, and fetched water in a large brass container balanced precariously on her head, walking long distances every day to and from the dirty river. The village well ran dry every summer.



Sunil got Anand, his best friend, to help him get the cart out. It was in a fairly good condition, except that some wooden spokes in the wheels were broken. "We need someone to fix that," said Sunil.

They had a long discussion, and then went to the village carpenter who was a genial man. He kindly offered to repair the cart free of charge. They were delighted, and set about the next step of getting bullocks.

The village headman heard them patiently. He had a pair of fine bullocks, and liked the idea of entering them in the race. He told them that he would only keep part of the prize-money if they won, and they could keep the rest.

So Sunil, Anand and Gopal, the headman, started on the long slow journey to Shivrampur.



The boys had never seen so many people. It was like a fair, with food and entertainment. They were fascinated at seeing the snake-charmer and his cobra, and the man with the black bear who did tricks at his command.

The race started with a bang. Gopal drove the cart alone, and the boys yelled encouragement at the top of their voices. Gopal's bullocks strained to their limit, and pulled ahead slowly and surely.

There was only one cart to overtake, but the finish line neared fast. The crowd went wild. Suddenly, the other cart veered off sharply with a broken wheel.

They won!





They jumped with joy. They danced wildly, and the crowd gathered around them, congratulating them, hugging them.

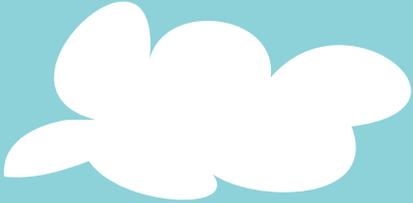
They were given thunderous applause as they collected their prize.

Even the bullocks seemed to share in the excitement as they started their long journey back home.

They got a hero's welcome at the village.

They and the bullocks were garlanded, and red bindis lovingly smeared on their foreheads.

The villagers will always remember the great win at the bullock cart races!



ABOUT THE WRITER

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Mr. Kersie Khambatta is a writer of children's stories, and short stories. He is based in Auckland, New Zealand.

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