

**"H**ush! hush! Shah Jahan, get away!" said 10-year-old Aarti waving away the bantam cock.

Shah Jahan eyed her defiantly, then began to strike his right wing on the ground and came charging towards her again. "Anil, did you see that?" she asked, turning to her eight-year-old brother.

"Yes, did you make a big mistake in naming this cock Shah Jahan. You should have called him 'fighter cock'."

"Quite right," said Aarti. "But Mumtaz Mahal's name is perfect. Isn't it Mumtaz?" she asked the lubby hen who was pecking quietly at some grain.

"Cluck, duck, duck," Mumtaz Mahal seemed to agree.

"I love Mumtaz Mahal," Anil said. "But I like Shah Jahan even more. He is so small but he is not scared of anyone."

Aarti sprinkled some chopped onion for the chickens and the children watched them gobble it up, pecking up pieces from between the blades of grass and ducking contentedly.

"You know something Anil," Aarti said thoughtfully, lying on the grass on her tummy aimlessly pulling out weeds with her hands. "Just Mama and Papa. And us. And this peace and quiet."

"Not me," said Anil springing up with a shik held as a sword and

pretending to fight with Shah Jahan. "I want adventure. I am going to be world famous didi. You just wait and see."

"Uh huh," said Aarti lazily, getting a little drowsy in the midmorning heat. "Let's see."

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harrumphing in her chest. Had Caesar killed Shah Jahan? What should she do? (Caesar was a ferocious dog. If she chased him as Anil was doing he would only run faster. If she ran to the house for help it would be too late to save Shah Jahan.)

No, Aarti decided, feeling a sudden burst of courage. She had to deal

bleeding gantly. Aarti cradled him in her arms, hot tears running down her cheeks as she crooned. "Poor Shah Jahan my poor little fighter cock!" Shah Jahan had suffered a bad shock and made no sound. It broke Aarti's heart to see him so still and so quiet. She heard a gentle gasping sobbing and remembered Anil. "He's dead isn't he, didi?" asked a subdued Anil.

# Fighting Fit

For a moment, she could not move. Caesar, their neighbour's big



Alsation dog, had caught Shah Jahan by the throat and was running away at top speed. Anil was bravely chasing him while screaming for help. Mumtaz Mahal was running round and round, clucking helplessly. Shah Jahan was bleeding. Some feathers had fallen and were lying like little flags on the grass.

Aarti felt sick with fear. She could feel her heart

with Caesar herself. But she would not run behind him. She would run towards him. And she would speak to him in that odd, harsh voice that Savera Uncle used when Caesar was being disobedient. So, putting aside her fear, Aarti ran to the Alsation and shouted commandingly. "Caesar stop!"

To her relief, Caesar slackened his pace. Taking courage from this, Aarti went still closer and shouted, "Drop it! Drop it!"

Caesar looked undecided for a second, but frightened by the note of authority in Aarti's voice, he relaxed his jaws. Shah Jahan struggled out of his grasp and fell on the ground.

Aarti issued the first order to the now shame-faced dog. "Get out!" She then turned her attention to her pet. Shah Jahan had four sharp tooth marks on his neck and was

"No, Anil, he's not dead, but I don't know how badly he's hurt," said Aarti.

"Let's take him inside the house and ask Mama to phone the vet." They went inside, followed by a fanatical clucking Mumtaz Mahal.

Mama rang up the vet who advised them to keep Shah Jahan warm and quiet.

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ill he came over. She then listened to the children's story comforting them all the while that Shah Jahan would recover. "See, the bleeding has stopped already. And by tomorrow all that we'll remember is

how brave you two have been." In a little while the vet arrived. He examined Shah Jahan and gave him an injection to prevent infection, and pronounced him fit. Shah Jahan eyed him from the corner of his eye, then got up and began to chase him. The vet chuckled. "I think I will have to correct that," he said. "Shah Jahan is now fighting fit!" Everyone laughed.

After the vet left, Mama rang up Papa and gave him the news. Papa was his usual practical self. "Well," he said, "first things first, I am sending a carpenter to the house immediately to repair the hole in the fence through which Caesar must have sneaked in. Now that that dog had tasted blood, he will certainly come again if the fence is not repaired. Now then, let me talk to my children."

First, Papa spoke to Anil. "Well done, Aarti! I am proud of you!"

"Thank, Papa," said Aarti happily. "But I could not have done it alone. Anil was very brave. He made Caesar run. Otherwise Caesar would have killed Shah Jahan immediately."

"Is that so?" asked Papa. "In that case I am very proud of both my children. Give him the telephone so that I can congratulate him too." The telephone was handed to a beaming Anil. His face brightened even more when Papa announced that he was bringing home a huge chocolate cake, soft drinks, cheese, straws and simonais and jikos to celebrate. Not to mention some tid-bits for two very special guests in the dining room.

"Who?" asked Anil puzzled.

"Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, of course!" said Papa.

That evening, when the party was over, Aarti turned to Anil and asked, "So Anil, how did you like your adventures?"

Anil thought for a moment before answering. "Very much, now that it is over!"

"Me," said Aarti, yawning lazily. "I like this peace and quiet."

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GITANJALI PRASAD



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