

# Close Encounters of a Different Kind

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Plenty of water has flown under the bridge since my first posting at Pangode. But the memories of those good old days at Pangode are permanent. Thoughts of lush green hill tops, vast paddy fields, minarets of mosques that protrude skywards above the coconut trees, weekly market days and those innocent farmers with their sense of humour still keep me awake, on long sleepless nights.

Those days were good for veterinarians. Veterinarians were essentially clinicians. After clinic there was a lot of time in the evening for reading, games, music and other thing that caught your fancy. Now, it's the other way round. A field veterinarian seldom finds time for the clinic and most of his time is taken up by extension activities which could have been very well handled by less competent people.

It was on one of those cloudy evenings and I was waiting for a bus after work. It was those days when any neatly dressed young man with a briefcase was taken to be one of those 'gulf-returned'. With the slight drizzle, the sky was overcast as people took shelter in those wayside pan shops. Among the curious that fixed their sights on me was one pair of red eyes that I particularly noticed. One, that belonged to other than the human species.

It was a huge buck standing fifty metres away from me across the road. He was sporting a rather large beard, looked shabby and I assumed smelled ugly too. I watched and saw those red eyes turn hot and fiery by the minute. I could feel his gaze pass through me like a laser beam. From my encounters with the other kind during my days at the veterinary college hostel, I knew the looks were hostile.

He began by slowly walking towards me staring with eyes fixed on me, slowly gathering momentum till he finally brushed past scraping by my right knee. Retreating, he went back to his old position standing there as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. I looked around and to my surprise found that I was the centre of attraction. Those curious bulging eyes let me know I

had something drastic in store for me.

I turned around to the sound of pounding hooves and before I could dodge around I was butted on the knee with all the might of that hairy head. Caught off guard I was thrown on my feet and landed right in the middle of a muddy pool of rainwater. My briefcase zoomed past like a flying saucer and landed in the middle of the road. I slowly regained my posture and stood erect, everything was a mess. Mud and filth all over me, my pride dropping to an all time low. There were cheers from the young among the crowd and a look of concern on the faces of the elderly.

I felt like the loser of a Spanish bull-fight, although the arena was small the spectators made up in numbers and seemed to enjoy every moment of it. I rubbed my right knee, which had blown out of all proportion. The cardinal sign of inflammation had set in. I felt for a fractured patella, but the whole area was swollen and numb. I couldn't distinguish between which was which.

The beast was back at its starting block, shifting gears getting ready for his final assault on the maimed enemy. His bloodshot eyes gleamed and he was fuming like a locomotive. That was when my blood boiled. I would get back this time. The words of my football coach, who had saved my skin on many an occasion rang in my ears "offence is the best form of defense". I planned my moves as he tore down with all his might. I swerved aside, shifted my weight to my maimed right leg and booted him with all the power in my left leg, on to his ribcage.

There was a moan followed by a thud. He fell like a log of wood in lateral recumbency. There was a moment of silence as the cheering died down. The whole world seemed to stand still for a moment, the wind had stopped blowing, the birds stopped chirping, the leaves stopped waving and the raindrops seemed to hang frozen in mid air.

The crowd drew nearer forming a small circle around me, and the conquered beast. My professional calling came back to me as I slipped down on to my knees and bent

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*Continued on page 10*