THE CLEVER CALF

Illustrated by Reboti Bhusan
THIS is the story of a calf called Luthia. She was the prettiest little calf you could imagine, fawn-coloured, with great clear eyes. In fact, she had all the marks of a future Panchkalyani cow: she had rings of white above her hoofs; she had a white crescent mark on her forehead. Everybody liked her, and her master was proud of her.
The other farm animals loved Luthia, and were very kind to her. This was just as well for she had lost her mother when she was only twelve days old. Dhauli, the white cow, and Shyama, the black one, adopted her as their own, feeding her with their own milk, and licking her clean. The bullocks, Hira and Moti, and the big bull Parbat, were all very kind to her, taking great care of her, and guarding her with interest.
With everybody so fond of her, and no mother to correct her, Luthia became rather naughty. She was full of tricks. She bothered the bullocks when they were resting after a long day’s work. She disturbed the cows in their sleep by licking their eyes or chewing their ears. Her favourite victim was the big bull, Parbat. She made faces at him, or pulled his tail, or jumped over him when he was asleep. Parbat was as strong as a giant, with a thick neck, and red eyes. He got very cross with Luthia. But he was tied strongly in his halter and was helpless against the teasing Luthia. He could only make angry noises and dig the ground with his hoofs while she stood a little way off and laughed at him. Still, Parbat really liked her, and sometimes joined in her frolics.

All the farm animals went out into the jungle every day to graze except Luthia who was left at home all alone. It seemed to her that the others were having great fun in the jungle, and she too
wanted to go and join in. She went to her master and asked him to let her go out with the others, and he agreed. So off she went into the jungle with them.

In this jungle there was a wily fox, who said he was the adviser and the best friend of the king of the forest, who is, as you all know, the lion. The fox pretended to represent the lion, and wanted all other animals to treat him as king. If anybody showed disrespect, the fox bullied him, and stopped him from grazing there. When any animal went to the forest for the first time, the fox expected the animal to go before him, bow down and pay homage.

Since Luthia was going to the jungle for the first time, the old cow Shyama warned her about the fox. Shyama told her that she should treat him like a real king, and be very, very respectful. "Is he really the
king?” asked Luthia. “No,” said Shyama, “he is only a fox, and he is a great nuisance and a trouble to us all. We have to pay homage to him to stop him bothering us.” “Then I don’t see why I should treat him like a king,” said Luthia, “and I shall not.”

When they went into the jungle, Luthia saw the fox sitting on a mound of clay, pretending it was a throne. Luthia thought this very funny, and couldn’t help laughing. “Silence,” shouted the fox. “Don’t you realise, you silly little creature, that you are in the court of a ruler? Stop laughing this instant! Come and touch my feet and apologise.”

Luthia pretended to be humble.
“I am sorry, my Lord, I didn’t know you were so great; I thought you were an ordinary fox.” “Will you or will you not come and pay homage to the representative of the great king, the lion?” asked the fox.

And do you know what Luthia said? She said, “I don’t think you look anything like a king. You are just a silly fox, sitting on a mound of clay.”

At this, all the other animals there started laughing and jeering at the fox. The fox was taken by surprise, and was quite at loss to know what to do. He would have liked to jump at Luthia and attack
her, but as she was with all the other bulls and cows, the fox thought he had better not. He went angrily away, and swore to be revenged for his disgrace.

The fox decided to wait for an opportunity to kill Luthia, but there was no chance as she was always with the other stronger animals or in the farmyard. One night, he prowled around the farmyard, looking for a way to get in to kill Luthia. But as there was a strong fence all round, he could not get in. Luthia had seen him crouching outside, and she thought she would tease him.
“Who is there?” she asked. “Oh, I think it is an old cat. Perhaps waiting for a rat.” The fox was very angry at this, but there was nothing he could do.

Having failed in his attempt to attack her, the fox decided to kill Luthia by cunning. He decided to make friends with her, and lure her out. He stood outside the farmyard one day, and called out, “Luthia, I admit you have won. We don’t do any good by quarrelling. Let us make it up, and be friends. We could be good friends, you and I.”

“How do I know I can trust you? asked Luthia. “How can anybody trust anybody else?” asked the fox. “We must show our love by trusting each other.”
"Give me a little time to think it over," said Luthia. The fox said he would come back to know her decision and went away. But clever Luthia knew the fox was only trying to find another way to attack her. Going to Parbat, the strong bull, she said, "What a pity that such a strong friend as you can't help me against a little fox."

"What can I do?" asked Parbat. "The fox is light-footed and clever and would never come near me."

"I think you are afraid of the fox," said Luthia, trying to irritate him, "and I think the fox is more powerful than you!"

"No!" roared the bull. "No! I am not afraid. Just let him get near me, and I will show you what I will do to him!"

"All right," said Luthia, after thinking a minute, I will get the fox near you, but I hope you
will not be frightened and run away.”

“No, I won’t run away; I will tear him to pieces,” he said. So when the fox came back the next night, Luthia said, “I think you really mean well, now, so let us be friends.”

“That is a sweet little Luthia,” said the fox, “come out and have a chat.”

“Not so soon,” she said. “Give me a little more time: come tomorrow night and wait outside for me. I will arrange for the gate to be kept open. You just sit under that tree with your back to me and keep your
eyes shut. Don’t open them until I say ‘Wake up, here comes your friend, Luthia.’ If I see you peeping, I shall take it as cheating and go back.”

The fox agreed to do as she wanted and promised to come back the next night.

Then Luthia told Parbat of her plan to get the fox wait for her with his eyes closed.

Next night the fox came and sat under the tree, waiting for Luthia to come. “Wake up, here comes your friend, Luthia,” said Luthia, and the fox heard the sound of hoofs approaching. He thought he would soon have Luthia at his mercy and was delighted.
But it was Parbat who was coming up behind him. The fox heard heavy footsteps, and scenting danger, he looked round. But too late! Parbat rushed forward and charged, tossing the fox way, way up into the air. Then he came down plunk! He fell heavily and lay there a long time. Before daybreak he got up and limped away into the jungle. But after
some time he was ashamed even to stay in that jungle and left for a place, far, far away.

And all the animals rejoiced that the wily fox had been driven away from the jungle by the clever Luthia.