

Edvard Edvardsson, Master Elk, spent much of each day watching the quiet road which led through the forest. Each morning, at about eight o'clock, summer and winter, the postie-man would pedal his bicycle up the road from the tiny village of Jullanpattallaintundrannainen, to deliver parcels and letters and bread to the old couple who lived in the cottage in the middle of the forest. In winter, the postman had his front lamp and rear lamp lit, his tyres crunched in the snow, and his breath blew out like a cloud of steam. Edvard had once, in his migratory travels, seen a train, and was greatly perturbed by it. The postie-man's breath always reminded him of the ugly train. In summer, however, no lights were required, and the postie-man often whistled and sang as he cycled up the forest-road, and then, twenty minutes later by Edvard's old-fashioned turnip-watch, which he had inherited from his father (also Edvard Edvardsson), the postie-man cycled back to the village again.

Day after day, Edvard observed and the postie-man cycled. The shorter days of Spring turned into the endless days of summer, when the sky never turned dark and the sun never set. Hypnotised by the unchanging routine of the morning delivery, Edvard Edvardsson could not tear himself away from the bushes which lined the roadway. As soon as he heard, distantly, the regular squeak of the pedals, he was there, waiting for that glorious moment when the postie-man would emerge from around the corner, pedal slowly past, whistling or singing, or simply humming a tune to himself, pass by Edvard's hide-out, and squeak slowly into the distance again. And twenty minutes later, the performance would be repeated, in reverse.

Edvard admired many things about this: the eternal squeaking of the pedals, the effortless way in which the postie-man propelled himself along, the crackle of the tyres on the gravelly surface, the long slow moment when he disappeared around the next corner, and silence descended once more over the scene. But especially he longed for the effortlessness of propulsion.

Edvard Edvardsson, like any other Elk, much preferred standing still to roaming around the peaty boggy forest floor. The damp earth, wet even at the height of summer, made his hooves cold. And the midges and mosquitoes! The only way to avoid them was to gallop away, and that was very tiring.

How very nice it would be, thought Edvard, just to climb aboard a bicycle and sail away from the biting flies, without breaking sweat. How very nice indeed for an Elk.

The next morning, the shiny bicycle, with its postie-man on top, came sailing by. Edvard thought: I'll have one of those.

Edvard made a plan. And one day, when the postie-man came up the road, Edvard was not at his usual point of observation, scarcely hidden between an elder tree and a gorse-bush, but further on, where the old couple's cottage stood in a clearing, surrounded on all sides by the mighty forest and an impenetrable hush. Edvard waited in the shadow, and watched the postie-man sail in to the yard on his bicycle. He admired the ease with which the postie-man lifted his right leg up and over the saddle and cruised to a standstill while balanced only on the left-hand

pedal; then ran to a halt, leaned the machine against the wall, knocked on the cottage door and went inside.

Edvard saw his chance. Without hesitation, he galloped out from cover, across the yard, stuck his head through the frame of the bicycle, and with one shake of his mighty head, had the machine entangled in his antlers. Bellowing with delight, he scarpered into the forest again, vaguely hearing cries of anger behind him. No matter: Edvard had a bicycle.

What Edvard had not thought through was this: that a postie-man has two long legs, which can reach the pedals, and two long arms which can grip the handle-bars. And that elks have four legs, admittedly quite long also, but in no way adapted to correct posture on a bicycle of any design. Balancing was also an issue. And so, the bicycle soon ended up, battered and trampled, in a small pond in the middle of the forest, and Edvard stamped around the forest in a very bad mood indeed.

For the next week or so, Edvard observed the postie-man each morning as he walked on his delivery-round, hot, red in the face and out of breath. Occasionally the postie-man shook his fist in the general direction of the forest and called down judgement and destruction upon "thieving elks". Edvard was unimpressed, knowing that he had only borrowed the bicycle and that, if the man really wanted his machine back, he only had to go and find it in that pond over yonder - about five miles away through thick and fly-ridden forest.

Then, after ten days or so, Edvard heard a new noise in the forest, like the sound the foresters make when they come and cut down trees. Worried, he went to have a look at the road; and was only just in time to see a flash of steel and chrome, a trail of belching smoke, and something disappearing into the distance. Ten minutes later, Edvard heard the sound approaching from the direction of the cottage. He crouched down low, with barely the top two feet of his antlers showing above the bush. He was amazed at what he saw: for the postie-man was now travelling on a bright new, shiny, noisy, graceful, speeding motor-bike. He had a proper helmet, with skull and cross-bones; a leather-jacket, and everything. Edvard stood up and gaped, and the postie-man made rude signs at him. Edvard noticed none of these - only the beauty of the machine, the incredible noise it made, the smoke pouring out from behind it, the splendid helmet.

Ah-ha, Edvard thought, I'll have one of those.

It was not so easy, stealing the motor-bike. The postie-man, on arrival at the cottage in the forest, always put a very large padlock around the front wheel, and attached it to an iron bar cemented into the wall of the house. As Edvard found to his cost, it was no simple matter even to work out how to detach the padlock. And he never got the chance. On three occasions, the postie-man had come bursting out of the cottage, just as Edvard thought he had begun to get it cracked; and had thrown stones at him, and called him nasty names, until Edvard retreated into the forest.

But Edvard Edvardsson, Master Elk, was a sly one. He waited until winter came, and the days grew so short that there were no dawns at all, only one long dark

night. In such a long dark night, the postie-man would drive up the road on his motor-bike, headlight blazing, engine snorting, sparks flying from the exhaust. And Edvard Edvardsson, he watched and waited. Until the long dark night came when a blizzard blew, and the postie-man skidded on ice and fell off his bike. And never managed to find it again.

In the distance, behind the noise of the wind, he could hear an elk sounding and an engine being revved, and the cracking of breaking branches. But never again did he see his beloved motor-bike.

And so the postie-man bought himself a snow-plough...