

The child got lost at  
the crowd



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

I was about six years old the day I got lost. We were visiting India on holiday and my mother and I had gone out to shop. I had never seen so many people together at once. There were shopkeepers calling out to us from every corner, and nearly five times as many customers. People kept pushing each other trying to make their way through the crowd. I noticed a little girl about my age standing inside a shop and staring at me through the window. She looked like she wanted to talk. I smiled at her and she stuck her tongue out at me. Angry, I made a face back at her. She did the same. We had been pulling terrible expressions at each other for a while when I finally got tired of it and began to laugh. The girl laughed too. 'What a strange girl,' I said to my mother. Hearing no reply I turned around. My mother had disappeared.

My parents and older relatives had always asked me to be a sensible girl and stay calm when something bad happened. So I did not scream. At least, not right away. All of a sudden the crowd seemed to grow bigger, busier. The entire time that I was looking at the girl I had stopped taking notice of it, but now it swarmed around me like a horde of wildebeest. I seemed to drown in trouser legs, saris, skirts, belts, shawls - everywhere around there were stomachs, knees, feet, hands - not a single face could I see. Getting whirled around in that oppression of rustling cloth and foreign smells, I finally screamed as loudly as I could manage: 'Mommy!'

The crowd around me seemed to slow down. People did not stop right away but I got the impression of more air, people seemed to be moving away. One or two of them stopped at a distance and stared down at me curiously. I did not fit the scene somehow, even though there were other children around,

most of who looked not too different from me. My clothes, my skin, my hair, everything seemed to be on display as they looked so intently at me. I was about to start crying when I felt a hand on my shoulder. Normally, I would perhaps have jumped at such an unknown feeling.