

A Gift of Chappals

A smiling Rukku Manni **threw open** the door. Ravi and Meena **rushed out**, and Ravi pulled Mridu into the house. “Wait, let me **take off** my slippers,” protested Mridu. She **set them out** neatly near a pair of large black ones. Those were grey, actually, with dust. You could see the clear mark of every toe on the front part of each slipper. The marks for the two big toes were long and **scrawny**.

Mridu didn’t have much time to **wonder** about whose slippers they were, because Ravi dragged her to the **backyard**, behind a thick bitter-berry **bush**. There, inside a **torn** football lined with **sacking** and filled with sand, lay a very small **kitten**, **lapping** up milk from a coconut half-shell.

“We found him outside the gate this morning. He was mewing and mewing, poor thing,” said Meena. “It’s a secret. Amma says Paati will leave for our Paddu Mama’s house if she knows we have a cat.”

“People are always telling us to be kind to animals, but when we are, they **scream**. ‘Ooh, don’t bring that dirty creature here!’ ” said Ravi. “Do you know how hard it is just to get a little milk from the kitchen? Paati saw me with a glass in my hand just now. I told her I’m very hungry, I want to drink it, but the way she looked at me! I had to drink most of it to **throw her off the scent**. Then she wanted the **tumbler** back. ‘Paati, Paati, I’ll wash it myself, why should I put you to trouble’, I told her. I had to run and pour the milk into this coconut shell and then run back and wash the tumbler and put it back before she got really suspicious. Now we have to think of some other way to feed Mahendran.”



“Mahendran? This little kitty’s name is Mahendran?” Mridu was impressed! It was a real name—not just a cute kitty-cat name.

“Actually his full name is Mahendravarma Pallava Poonai. M.P. Poonai for short if you like. He’s a fine breed of cat. Just look at his **fur**. Like a lion’s **mane**! And you know what the **emblem** of the ancient Pallava kings was, don’t you?” he looked **expectantly** at Mridu.

Mridu **giggled**.

“Think I’m joking? Well, just wait. I’ll show you sometime. It’s clear you don’t know a thing about history. Haven’t been to Mahabalipuram, have you?” he said **mysteriously**. “Well, when our class went to Mahabalipuram, I saw a **statue** of his **thatha’s** thatha’s thatha’s thatha’s

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thatha's... **etcetera**, etcetera... Fact is, Mahendran here is **descended** from that very same ancient cat. A close relative, scientifically speaking, of none other than the lion. The Pallava lion, emblem of the Pallava dynasty!" Ravi went on, walking around the bitter-berry bush, waving a **twig** up and down, his eyes **sparkling**. "This cat is a descendant of none other than the Mahabalipuram Rishi-Cat! And if I may just remind you, they **worshipped** cats in ancient Egypt!"

How he loved the sound of his own voice! Meena and Mridu **exchanged looks**.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Mridu demanded.

"Huh! I'm telling you this cat is descended... from the Egyptian cat-god... no, goddess! **Bastet!** Ya! That's it!"

"So?"

"Well, one of the **descendants** of that cat-goddess was a **stowaway** in one of the Pallava ships, and his descendant was the Mahabalipuram Rishi-Cat, whose descendant is —" Ravi **flourished** his twig at Mahendran "— M.P. Poonai here... **whoop EEK!**" he **shrieked**, very pleased with himself.

Mahendran looked up, **alarmed**. He had just been sharpening his **claws** on the edge of the coconut shell. But worse than Ravi's **awful** whoop EEK was a 'Kreech...!' from the window. What a weird sound! If Mridu was **startled**, M.P. Poonai was **frightened out of his wits**. Hair standing on end, he bounced up and **scurried** towards a bamboo tray of red chillies that had been set out to dry. Trying to hide beneath it, he **tipped** a few chillies over himself. "Mi-a-aw!" he **howled** miserably.

The 'kreeching' went **on and on**. "What's that noise?" said Mridu.

"That's Lalli learning to play the violin," grunted Ravi.

"She'll never learn a thing. The musicmaster just goes on playing like a train **whizzing** on and on, while Lalli's all the time **derailing!** Going completely **off track!**"



(To be continued.....)

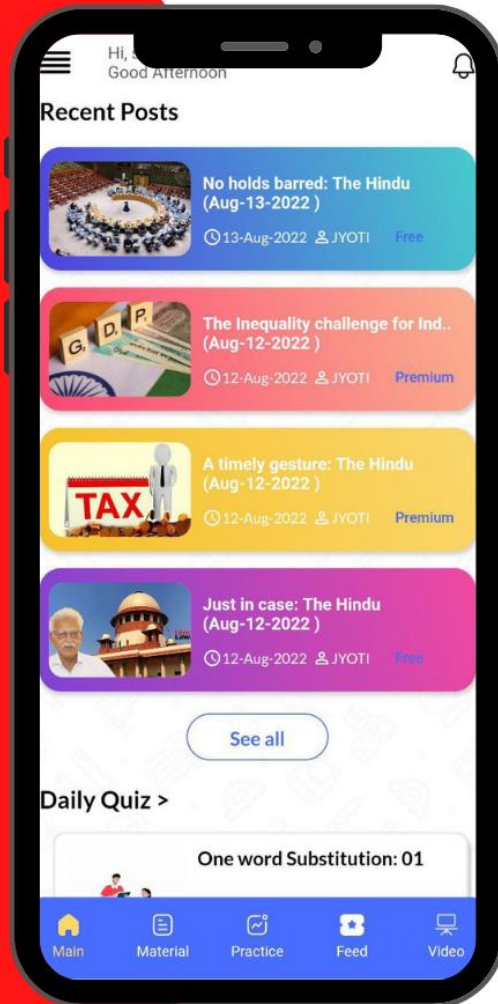
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Vocabulary

- Throw open** (phrasal verb) – to open suddenly. खोलना (एकाएक)
- Rush out** (phrasal verb) – To exit, escape, or depart (from something or some place) very quickly or all at once. जल्दी से निकलना
- Take off** (phrasal verb) – to remove something उतारना
- Set out** (phrasal verb) – To put in a specified position or arrangement; place: जगह पर रखना
- Scrawny** (adjective) – skinny, thin, bony, scraggy, lean पतला
- Wonder** (verb) – ponder, think about, deliberate about सोचना
- Backyard** (noun) – The grounds in back of a house पिछला आंगन
- Bush** (noun) – shrub, woody plant झाड़ी
- Torn** (adjective) – ripped, ragged, lacerated, mangled, tattered फटा हुआ
- Sacking** (noun) – rough woven material that is used to make sacks बोरा बनाने का टाट
- Kitten** (noun) – a very young cat बिल्ली का बच्चा
- Lap** (verb) – Drink, sip, swallow, suck पीना
- Scream** (verb) – Utter a sudden loud cry; shout, yell, shriek चिल्लाना
- Throw someone off the scent** (phrase) – mislead someone in the course of a search or investigation.
- Tumbler** (noun) – glass, acrobat, roller, cup, goblet गिलास
- Fur** (noun) – the short, fine, soft hair of certain animals. बाल
- Mane** (noun) – thick, long hair on the neck and head of some mammals (lions) घोड़े शेर आदि जानवरों के गले पर बाल
- Emblem** (noun) – symbol, sign, badge, mark, insignia प्रतीक
- Expectantly** (adverb) – hopefully, eagerly, optimistically, longingly उम्मीद से/आशा करते हुए
- Giggle** (verb) – laugh, chuckle, titter, snicker, chortle हँसना/ खिसियाना
- Mysteriously** (adverb) – Secretively, enigmatically, furtively रहस्यपूर्ण ढंग से
- Statue** (noun) – sculpture, figure, bust, figurine, statuette प्रतिमा/मूर्ति
- Thatha** (noun) – old-man or grandpa दादाजी

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24. **Etcetera** (noun) – etc, and so on वगैरह, आदि
25. **Descend** (from) (verb) – to have a particular person, group, or type of people in your family background
26. **Twig** (noun) – A small shoot or branch of a tree or other plant टहनी, डाली
27. **Sparkle** (verb) – shine brightly with flashes of light. चमकना
28. **Worship** (verb) – pray to, adore, reverence, idolize, revere पूजा करना
29. **Exchange look** (phrase) – look at someone looking at you.
30. **Bastet** (noun) – Bastet is the Egyptian goddess of the home, domesticity, women's secrets, cats, fertility, and childbirth.
31. **Descendant** (noun) – Successor, offspring, progeny, children, heir वंशज
32. **Stowaway** (noun) – someone who hides on a ship to travel without having to pay छिपकर यात्रा करनेवाला
33. **Flourish** (verb) – thrive, prosper, bloom, grow, blossom फलना-फूलना
34. **Whoop** (noun) – a loud cry of joy or excitement. ललकार, चीख
35. **EEK** (exclamation) (noun) – used to express alarm, horror, or surprise.
36. **Shriek** (verb) – Utter a shrill cry; scream, screech, yell, howl, shout ज़ोर से चिल्लाना
37. **Alarmed** (adjective) – scared, fearful, worried, frightened, afraid घबराया हुआ
38. **Claw** (noun) – nail, hook, talon पंजा
39. **Awful** (adjective) – terrible, dreadful, horrible, appalling, atrocious भयानक
40. **Startle** (verb) – to surprise somebody/something in a way that slightly shocks or frightens him/her/it हैरत में डालना, डरना
41. **Frighten out of one's wits** (phrase) – to make someone very frightened
42. **Scurry** (verb) – to move quickly, short steps: Stroll, walk जल्दी जल्दी दौड़ना
43. **Tip** (verb) – to pour a substance from one container into another or onto a surface: उंडेलना
44. **Howl** (verb) – If a dog or wolf howls, it makes a long, sad sound:
45. **on and on** (phrase) – continuing for a long time
46. **Whizz** (verb) – to move very fast
47. **Derail** (verb) – If a train derails or is derailed, it comes off the railway tracks. पटरी से उतरना
48. **Off track** (phrase) – situated or taking place away from a racetrack.



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