

A Gift of Chappals

Soul of the Chapter

Mridu goes to Rukku Manni's House

Mridu is a young girl living with her grandmother Tapi and grandfather Thatha in Chennai. Mridu goes along with Tapi to her aunt Rukku Manni's place one afternoon. There she meets her cousins Lalli, Ravi and Meena. Everyone at Rukku Manni's house was glad to see Mridu. There was a thick bitter-berry bush in their backyard, Ravi took her beside that. There was small little kitten inside a torn football. The small creature was busy drinking milk that was kept inside a half-shell of a coconut.

The Kitten

Meena informed Mridu that they have found the kitten outside their house in the morning of that day. But, they must keep it as a secret otherwise the grandmother will leave their house immediately. Ravi was upset that they were being taught to be kind towards animals, but when he was trying to do so elders were screaming at them calling the kitten a dirty creature. His grandmother was suspicious while he was taking out milk for the kitten from kitchen. He had to drink more than half of the milk to make her believe that it was for him.

He also told Mridu that they have named the kitten as Mahendran. Mridu loved the name because it sounded real unlike those cute ones you keep for the kittens. Ravi further added that its complete name was Mahendravarma Pallava Poonai and M P Poonai in short.

He informed her he could make it from its fur that it was a fine breed cat, a close relative of lion family like the one that Pallava kings used in their emblem. To this Mridu giggled which instigated Ravi to prove his knowledge about the history further. On his school trip to Mahabalipuram he had seen statue of a lion and he firmly believes that it was the ancestor of that kitten. He proudly announced that his small kitten is the descendant of Mahabalipuram Rishi-Cat. He reminded Mridu of cats being worshipped in ancient Egypt. He believed it to be a descendant of cat goddess, Bastet.

The 'Kreech' Noise

Ravi was busy in making all proud announcements about his kitten when a weird

sound 'Kreech...! came from the window. Mridu was shocked while Mahendran was frightened. Mahendran jumped with fear on a tray of red chillies kept under the Sun for drying. With the "kreeching noise continuing on the background, Mridu enquired what it was? Ravi informed her that it was Lalli learning to play the violin. Mridu peeped from the window and she found Lalli was holding the violin in an awkward position sitting a bit away from her music teacher who had his back towards the window.

The teacher was bald with a fringe of oiled black hair falling around his ears. There was a gold chain in the neck and a ring on this hand. He had a big toe with which he was thumping the ground. He was playing the notes perfectly on the violin while Lalli was struggling hard. His tracks were filled with melody while Lalli continued missing the notes.

The Beggar

Children were having fun peeping from the window when Rukku Manni called Ravi to send the beggar away. She was fed up with the beggar coming to their place for a week now and wanted him to find another house. The beggar had made himself comfortable at the garden. He was leaning against the neem tree with his upper cloth spread under it. He was about to snooze when he heard Ravi asking him to leave. He was shocked hearing this and called for lady of the house. An irritated Rukku Manni told Ravi that there wasn't anything left in the kitchen and asked the beggar not to come again.

Her voice was so loud that Ravi didn't have to repeat her words to the beggar. The beggar told them that he would leave after taking rest for a while. It was too hot outside and there were blisters in his feet. The children were in pain seeing this and started making plans to give him chappals.

The Gift

Mridu remembered seeing a pair of old grey chappals while she had entered Ravi's house. She asked Ravi whom they belonged to. Ravi took the chappals and gave it to the beggar and asked him not to come again. The beggar went away wearing the chappals and blessing the children. It was the time for the music teacher to leave. He was looking for his chappals. He called Lalli and they looked everywhere, but didn't find them. Lalli informed Rukku Manni about it. Rukku Manni questioned the children if they had seen anyone picking up the chappals.

Rukku Manni was really angry and Mridu couldn't control anymore. She told her that they have given the music teacher's chappals to the beggar. Rukku Manni went inside and brought Gopu mama's new chappals and gave them to the music teacher. The teacher was happy getting the new chappals, but still pretended as though it was tough for him to accept them.

Rukku Manni-the Loving Mother

The teacher called Ravi a monkey, an incarnation of lord Hanuman, which seemed clear that Rukku Manni didn't like. She wanted the teacher to leave immediately.

After he left, she called the children home and offered them some snacks. She thanked God that go to office in chappals, but needed them after coming home immediately. She wondered what she will tell him giving a hint that she will take the blame on herself.