



## A GIFT OF CHAPPALS

by Vasantha Surya

### SUMMARY

The following chapter 'A Gift of Chappals' has been written by Vasantha Surya. The chapter has been taken from a book titled 'Mridu in Madras: Goruchaka Turns Up'. The story has been written in two parts. It follows a group of children who innocently gift away the music-master's chappals to a beggar.

### Part - I

#### Mridu Goes to Rukku Manni's House

Mridu was a young girl who lived with her grandmother 'Tapi' and grandfather 'Thatha' in Madras (now Chennai). One afternoon, Mridu went along with Tapi to her aunt Rukku Manni's house. There, she met her cousins Lalli, Ravi, and Meena. Mridu took off her slippers and set them beside a pair of dusty and worn-out black slippers with marks of feet on it. Then, Ravi took her to the backyard, behind a thick bitter-  
berry bush.

#### M.P. Poonai, the Kitten

In the backyard, Ravi showed Mridu a torn football which was filled with sand. Inside the football, there was a small kitten which was drinking milk from the half-shell of a coconut. Meena explained to Mridu that they had found the kitten outside the gate in the morning that day. But, they had to keep it a secret otherwise Paati (grandmother) would leave their house if she gets to know about the cat. Ravi was upset that although the elders taught them to be kind towards the animals, they never allowed them to bring these animals home.

Ravi also told her that he had taken milk from the kitchen to feed the kitten, but he had to drink more than half of that milk because their grandmother had seen him and gotten suspicious. Ravi also told Mridu that they had named the kitten Mahendravarma Pallava Poonai. He was called M.P. Poonai for short.

## **The Great Ancestors of M.P. Poonai**

Ravi stated that he could confirm from its fur that it was a fine breed cat. Hearing this Mridu laughed, which made Ravi prove his knowledge of history. He said that Poonai was a close relative of the lion that the Pallava kings had used in their emblem. He told Mridu that when his class went to Mahabalipuram, he saw a statue that represented M.P. Poonai's ancestors. Hence, he proudly announced that his small kitten was the descendant of the Mahabalipuram Rishi-cat. He also reminded Mridu that cats were worshipped in ancient Egypt. So, he also believed the kitten to be the descendant of the Egyptian Cat goddess, Bastet.

While Ravi was creating elaborate stories about how someone from the family of the Egyptian cat goddess must have come to India on a Pallava ship, the group heard a weird sound coming from the window.

## **Lalli, the Musician**

The strange sound shocked everyone. The kitten jumped on a tray of red chillies kept under the Sun for drying. The kitten, then, tried to hide under the chillies. When Mridu asked about the noise, Ravi informed her that Lalli was trying to learn how to play the violin. He further joked that Lalli would never learn how to play the violin because the music-master played like a fast train, but Lalli played like a train going off the track because she always played out of tune.

## **Part – II**

SAATVIK  
STUDY STATION

## **Lalli and the Music-Master**

Mridu looked through the window and saw Lalli holding the violin in an awkward position while sitting in front of her music-master. The music-master was a thin, bald-headed man with a fringe of oiled black hair falling around his ears.

There was a gold chain around his neck and a diamond ring on his hand. He wore a gold-bordered veshti (dhoti) and was beating time on the floor with his big toe. He was playing the notes on the violin perfectly but Lalli was struggling to copy him. The music-master's notes seemed to give perfect melody. His hands would move on the violin effortlessly, creating lovely music. But Lalli's playing kept sounding like a derailing train.

## **The Beggar**

Just then, a beggar called out from the gate. Rukku Manni called Ravi to send the beggar away. She was fed up with the beggar coming to their place for the past week.

Now, she wanted him to find another house to beg. When the children reached the garden, the beggar was already sitting comfortably against the neem tree in the garden. He was about to go to sleep when he heard Ravi asking him to leave.

The beggar refused to believe that the kind Rukku Manni would send him away. When Rukku Manni told Ravi to send the beggar away because there was nothing left in the kitchen, the beggar heard her voice. He sighed and replied that he would leave after resting a while. It was too hot outside and his bare feet were burned. The children were in pain seeing his condition and started searching for a pair of chappals that they could give him.

### **The Gift**

Mridu noticed a pair of old grey chappals while she had entered Ravi's house. She asked Ravi if he knew the owner of those chappals. Ravi picked up the chappals without knowing about the owner of the chappals and gave it to the beggar. He told the beggar to never come back again, and the beggar quickly left after wearing the chappals and blessing the children. Then, it was time for the music-master to leave but he couldn't find his chappals. Mridu and Lalli looked for the chappals everywhere but couldn't find them.

### **The Music-Master's Chappals**

Hearing the noise, Rukku Manni asked about the problem. Then, she questioned the children if they had seen anyone picking up the chappals. When Mridu told her that they had given away the chappals to the beggar, Rukku Manni was very angry at them.

She immediately scolded Ravi, but Ravi said that she had told him the story of Karna who gave away everything he had, even his gold earrings in charity. Rukku Manni told Ravi that Karna gave his own things and not things that belonged to someone else.

She was very angry and apologized to the music-master. Then, she gave the new chappals belonging to Gopu Mama to the music-master. The music-master pretended to be unhappy even though he was really glad to have got new chappals.

### **Rukku Manni: The Loving Mother**

The music-master called Ravi a monkey. Rukku Manni didn't like that at all. So, she wanted the teacher to leave immediately. After he left, she called the children inside the home and offered them snacks.

She thanked God that Gopu Mama didn't go to the office those chappals, but he would need them as soon as he came home. She wondered what she would tell him

and began laughing. She wondered how Gopu Mama would react upon knowing that she had given away his chappals to the music-master.

## WORD – MEANING

Word	Meaning
Rushed out	to quickly come out
Glided	moved along smoothly
Protested	objected, complained
Veshti	dhoti (in Tamil)
Scrawny	thin (suggesting skinny toes)
Stumbled	followed haltingly
Lined	inner covering
Beringed	wearing a ring
Sacking	made up of sack
Snooze	short sleep
Lapping up	licking
Sternly	strictly
Half-shell	half rounded portion of a coconut
Kept my body and soul	managed to stay alive
Throw her off the scent	mislead her so that she won't understand the real purpose
Generosity	the quality of being kind and generous
Tumbler	glass
Wail	cry
Suspicious	doubtful
Feeble	lacking physical strength
Breed	race
Rumble	make a continuous deep sound
Mane	fur or hair on an animal
Withered	become dry

Emblem	symbol
Alms	beg
Thatha	grandfather (in Tamil)
Booming out	resonant sound
Twig	a woody shoot
Wearily	tired
Descended from	a descendent of or comes from the same family
Blisters	boils/bubbles on skin, from burns or rubbing
Stowaway	someone who hides himself/herself in a ship or an aircraft to travel unnoticed
Shabby	dirty and used
Flourish	wave something to attract attention
Sturdy	strongly built
Shrieked	an expression of excitement, pain or terror
Beamed	smiled
Alarmed	scared
Scurrying around	to move in hurry
Startled	to feel sudden shock
Lurking	waiting quietly (without attracting attention)
Out of his wits	completely
Groan	to make a deep inarticulate sound in response to pain or despair
Scurried	move fast with short quick steps
Brashly	cheekily or smartly
Howled	cried
Snapped	break
Whizzing	to move very quickly
Flung	to throw forcefully
Derailing	cause to run off tracks
Muttering	speak softly, to murmur

Jutting out	extending out
Catch sight of	glimpse for a moment
Glazed	shining
Clattered off	gone off noisily (with the noise or clatter of chappals)
Crept	moving slowly
Incarnate	come to life, in person
Tuft	a bunch or collection of something
Stiff	hard, rigid, firm

