



Guided Reading, week commencing 25th January 2021

Task 1, Monday.

Varjak Paw

Your first task is to read this extract from Chapter 6 of Varjak Paw.

- 1) Listen to Mr. Gamage read the extract on the blog.
- 2) Read it quietly to yourself.
- 3) Read it again and make a note of any words or phrases you are unsure about.
- 4) Read the text aloud to yourself, with expression.
- 5) Perform the text to someone else (sibling, parent, relative, friend, etc).
- 6) Do you think the other cat is going to help Varjak?

This extract finds Varjak taking shelter in a hut during a violent storm...



Chapter Nine

It was dark as midnight in the hut. It felt close and damp, but at least inside was drier than Outside. Varjak was safe at last. He relaxed. And then a low growl ripped the air.

The door slammed shut behind him.

'Don't move a muscle,' said a gravelly voice. 'You're surrounded.'

Varjak's claws slid out, ready to fight. 'Put those claws away,' commanded the voice.

Varjak opened his eyes wide. It was another cat! She had spiky black-and-white fur and mustard-coloured eyes. She looked about the same

age as him; younger than Jasmine or Julius, but harder, as if she'd seen too much of the world already.

'I'm not looking for a fight,' she said, 'but if you don't put the claws away, I'll rip you to shreds.' Something in her gravelly voice left Varjak in no doubt that she meant it.

'I'm not looking for a fight either,' he said, and put away his claws. The rain thudded on the roof of the hut like a nervous heartbeat.

'OK,' she said. 'This is my hut, my shelter. Everyone knows that. What are you doing here?'

Varjak glanced at the door. 'It's raining.'

'And?'

'And this was the only shelter I could find.'

'Can't you see it's taken?' she growled.

'Isn't it big enough for both of us?'

'There's only room for one.'

That certainly wasn't true, but Varjak didn't think she'd appreciate him saying it. He stared silently at the soggy timber floor. A puddle had already formed around him. He couldn't face going out again. Besides, she was the only cat he'd met since leaving home. She was nothing like a Mesopotamian Blue, but she wasn't like the Gentleman's cats either. There was nothing strange or scary about her – though you wouldn't want her for an enemy.

Varjak tried to smile through the dark at her.

She glared back.

'What's your name?' she said gruffly. 'I haven't seen you round here before.'

'It's Varjak Paw.'

'Varjak Paw?' she said. 'Varjak Paw? What kind of a name is that?'

What was wrong with his name? 'What's yours?'

'None of your business. Whose gang are you with? Who's your Boss? Are you running from the Vanishings?'

Varjak hesitated. What did all these questions mean? He didn't know – but he had to say something.

He blurted out the first thing that came to mind: something he didn't even believe himself. 'I'm a pure-bred Mesopotamian Blue.'

'A what?'

'A Mesopotamian Blue. We're very rare. Special cats.'

'Special?' she spluttered. 'I don't care how pure-bred you are, or where you think you're from. The only thing that counts is what you do.'

A blast of thunder rattled the hut. Varjak frowned. He'd never heard anyone talk like that before.

'What kind of cat are you?' he asked.

'I'm asking the questions, Special Cat,' she said. She sounded disgusted. 'Now tell me what you *really*

do. Are you one of Ginger's gang? Or are you with Sally Bones?'

Keep talking, that was the best thing. 'I told you, I'm a Mesopotamian Blue. We live on the hill.'

She sighed, and tapped her claws on the floor. 'Everyone knows there's no food up there. Even the gangs don't bother with it. Come on, tell the truth. You must be with a gang, or a little cat like you'd be starving by now.'

Her words sent a shiver down Varjak's spine. How could she not know about the Contessa's house? This world Outside and the world he came from seemed completely cut off from each other.

'Listen,' she said, 'if you're so high and mighty, how come you're out in the park in a storm?'

'I'm Outside because I need to talk to a dog,' he said. She stared at him as if she didn't understand. 'Dogs are huge, noisy monsters,' he explained.

'I know what a dog is,' she snapped.

Then maybe she could help. 'Do you know how to talk to them?'

She scowled, like she couldn't believe what she was hearing.

'I know it sounds strange,' said Varjak. 'But I've got to do it, to save my family. They're in a lot of danger.'

The black-and-white cat laughed out loud. 'He thinks he can talk to a dog!' Even her laugh sounded like the crunch of gravel. Varjak scratched an itch

under his collar. It felt uncomfortable.

'What's that you're scratching?' she said.

'My collar?'

'Collar...' A strange expression crossed her face; and then she seemed to relax. 'Isn't that what pets wear?'

Varjak peered at her own neck. She wore no collar.

'Yes, now it makes sense,' she said. 'You're just a pet cat who's got lost in the storm, aren't you? You're not in a gang. You don't know about the Vanishings. You don't know anything about this city at all, do you?'

Varjak almost denied it. Then he remembered his dream. Open Mind, the First Skill: *only when you admit that you know nothing, can you truly know anything*.

'All I know is that I need your help,' he said quietly. 'I need a place to stay until the storm's over, and then I've got to find a dog.'

She looked into his eyes for a long time. The rain

beat down, relentless. 'All right, pet cat,' she said at last. 'You can stay. Just till the rain stops, and then you go. Understand?'

Varjak smiled. 'Thanks.'

'Just don't talk to me about dogs, that's all,' she muttered.

They sat together in the darkness. Varjak was bursting with questions. Were there many other cats Outside? What were these gangs and Vanishings she kept talking about? And how, exactly, *did* you talk to a dog?

There were so many new things to understand. But the black-and-white cat was curled up into a spiky ball. Any more words would breach the invisible barrier she'd made between them.

The rain went on. Varjak shivered. He was cold and tired. His eyelids drooped. He tried to force them open, but they kept closing by themselves. It would be madness to fall asleep in a strange place with a strange cat, but he couldn't help it.

He slept in his corner of the hut, still shivering as the rainwater and slime dripped from his muddy fur.

