

Varjak Paw - S. F. Said

Lesson 3

The Outlaw Varjak Paw

On the next 4 pages is the **first chapter** of the **sequel to *Varjak Paw*, *The Outlaw Varjak Paw*.**

Read this chapter and think about the following questions:

- What is interesting about this chapter?
- How does it follow on from the story?
- Why is it included in the book?

Chapter One

IT WAS WINTER in the city. The sun was sinking fast. Night was drawing in. Snow whipped down from the sky in icy flakes. It was too cold for snow to melt, so it covered everything in white: the rooftops and drainpipes, the back streets and alleys.

A silver-blue cat with amber eyes raced forwards through the streets. His name was Varjak Paw, and he was running as fast as he could. He loved being out in the city. He'd grown up indoors, a pet in a house. He'd always dreamed about living free and wild. Now his dreams were coming true.

Beside him ran his friends: a spiky black-and-white cat called Holly, a shaggy chocolate-brown one named Tam, and a huge black dog called Cludge. They knew the city better than Varjak; he was still learning how to survive on the streets. And winter was harsh. Food was scarce. They'd been hunting all day with no luck. Now they were going to the city dump, hoping to find some scraps the people had thrown away.

They swerved into an alleyway. A rusting iron gate loomed up before them, rattling in the wind. It was the entrance to the dump. Far away on some main road, traffic rumbled and roared, but here the cars were all broken down. Their windscreens were smashed, their tyres slashed. Fragments of shattered glass stuck out of the snow. They could rip a cat's paws to pieces.

So this is it, thought Varjak. The city dump.

'Can't we keep hunting?' he said. 'I've got a good feeling. We're going to catch a mouse – we've got to!'

'I wish we would,' panted Tam. 'I'm starving.'

'Me too,' said Holly. 'But we haven't even seen a mouse since this snow started. They must be hiding from the weather. Or from *her*.' She shivered.

Above their heads, through swirling snow, an amber street light flickered into life. Day was almost done; nightfall was close. Holly and Tam shifted about on their paws. Even Cludge seemed nervous.

'Let's get it over with,' said Holly, her voice like the crunch of gravel. 'We don't want to be here after dark.'

Tam looked up at the rusty gate and shuddered. 'Er – why don't you and Varjak go first? I'll stay here and keep a look-out – even if I have to eat last,' she said, sounding very noble.

Holly rolled her mustard-coloured eyes. 'I might've known. Fine. Come on, Varjak. At least now we know who's scared and who's not.'

'I'm not scared!' protested Tam. 'It's just that we need a look-out. What if *she* comes? It's actually braver to go last. It's actually . . .'

She paused, and scratched her head. 'Actually, I think I'll come with you.'

'Oh no you don't,' laughed Holly. 'You're right. We need a look-out – and congratulations, Tam, you've got the job!'

Tam's big, round eyes went huge with fright. 'But – but—'

'It's all right,' said Varjak. He could see Holly was joking; but he could also see that Tam was not. 'I'll be look-out. I'll stand guard, with Cludge.'

Tam's fur settled. 'Thanks, Varjak! I'll save you some food – if we find any.'

Holly and Tam crept forwards through the snow, past hulking smashed-up cars, picking their way over shattered glass towards the gate. Chains and padlocks hung from it, clattering in the wind. But they found gaps, cracks, ways through that people would never think of. In moments, Varjak and Cludge stood alone.

thud

thud

thud

Varjak's fur prickled. He thought he could hear something behind him. A cat's tail thumping? Something was moving, someone was watching him.

He turned. Stared into the darkness at the top of the alley. No one there. Just snow. Rubbish. Plastic bags, scraps of paper, swirling in the wind.

thud

Oh. Of course. Now he knew what that noise was.

His own heart, thumping in his chest.

He breathed out, feeling foolish. Tam had made him jumpy. He turned to Cludge.

The big dog wagged his tail. 'Varjak!' he barked. 'Varjak scared of rubbish!' He stretched out a huge paw and swatted away a scrap of paper. 'Not be scared,' he panted. 'Cludge here.'

Varjak smiled. Cludge always made him feel better. After all, what was there to be afraid of when they had a massive dog on their side? Even Holly and Tam were a bit nervous around Cludge, still getting used to the idea of being friends with a dog. Only Varjak had seen the truth: that for all his strength and size, Cludge sometimes felt as scared and lonely as any cat.

'How about you, Cludge?' he asked. 'You OK?'

'Cludge cold,' said the dog. 'Cludge hungry. But Cludge happy with Varjak!'

His tail wagged again, and Varjak felt glad he'd stayed out here, after all. He didn't want to go into the dump anyway. What was the best they could find? Some mouldy old rubbish. That was no way for a cat to live.

He could do better than that – especially if he used his powers. For Varjak knew a secret that gave a cat great power. It was called the Way. There were Seven Skills in the Way. He'd learned them in his dreams, where he'd visited the ancient land of Mesopotamia and been trained by the warrior cat Jalal.

He settled down by a car and closed his eyes. He remembered Jalal's voice, coming at him through the Mesopotamian night. *The First Skill is Open Mind*. Varjak cleared his mind of thoughts. He made himself calm and still, open to everything.

Now the Second Skill: Awareness. He let his senses flow out into the city. He could smell the rubbish rotting, and felt sure there'd be nothing in the dump anyone would want to eat. But his sensitive whiskers also felt a tiny shift in the air currents. Something was moving. Not rubbish; something warm, and near –

A mouse! It was a juicy mouse, hidden just behind that car. His mouth watered; his belly growled. This was what he'd been searching for all day. He imagined crunching into the mouse, sinking his teeth in, savouring every bite –

No. Don't get carried away. Focus.

Hunting was the Third Skill. *When you stalk your prey, you become your prey. You make it a part of yourself.*

Now he was ready. He tensed his body tight, tight. His muscles coiled –
– and Varjak Paw sprang forwards, a silver-blue blur, diving under the car, towards his prey –

– and *WHAM!* There it was, beneath his paws. Fresh mouse, the finest food in all the world.

Holly slouched back through the gate. ‘There’s nothing good in there,’ she sighed. ‘It’s disgusting. But hey . . . what’s that you’ve got?’

‘What does it look like?’ he grinned.

‘Oh – Varjak! You found one!’ Her mustard-coloured eyes lit up. She licked her lips – and then stopped. ‘But how are we going to share it out, between us all?’

Thud.

‘What you’re going to do,’ said a brash, loud voice behind them, ‘is give that mouse to *us*.’

Comprehension

Chapter 26

1. What is the monster's name?

Chapter 27

2. Where did the reach at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 28

3. Who has a 'voice like milk'?

Chapter 29

4. Why did Varjak not tell his family about his dreams?

Chapter 30

5. Where does Holly say everyone has gone?

Chapter 31

6. What is the Seventh Skill?

Chapter 32

7. What motto does Varjak remember from his dreams?

Chapter 33

8. How did Varjak turn the cats off?

Chapter 34

9. Find an example of onomatopoeia in this chapter.

Chapter 35

10. Why did Cludge climb the wall?

Vocabulary

1. Climb
2. Proper
3. Agreement
4. Hesitate
5. Flicker
6. Concentration
7. Chaos
8. Shove
9. Merge
10. Mercy
11. Peer
12. Noble
13. Failure
14. Deadly
15. Burst
16. Interrupt
17. Avoid
18. Glare
19. Convince
20. Surround
21. Forgotten
22. Flared
23. Velvet
24. Creature
25. Bristly

HOMEWORK

Explain why you **like** or **do not like** the **ending** of the book.

OR

Write a **short story** using **at least 5 new words** (above) that we learned from these chapters.