

1 Phut Phat knew, at an early age, that humans were a poor breed. They were unable to see in the dark, they ate and drank incredible concoctions, and they had only five senses. The two humans who lived with Phut Phat could not even transmit their thoughts without resorting to words. Phut Phat identified these humans as One and Two. It was One who provided the creature comforts—beef on weekdays, liver on Sunday. Two, on the other hand, was valued chiefly for games and a warm cuddle now and then.

2 These little games, naps on downy cushions, outings in the cage on the fire escape, and two meals a day constituted the pattern of Phut Phat's life.

3 Then one Sunday he sensed a disturbing break in the household routine. Furniture was rearranged, and the house was filled with flowers, which he was not allowed to chew. Late in the day he found One at her dressing table, fussing with her hair and thoughtless of his growing hunger. Hopping lightly to the table, Phut Phat fastened his blue eyes on One's

forehead, and in that attitude he concentrated.

4 "Oh, John, I forgot," she said suddenly. "Would you feed Phut Phat?"

5 Phut Phat scarcely had time to swallow his meal, wash his face, and arrange himself on the living room mantelpiece before people started to arrive.

6 It was a large party, and Phut Phat observed that very few of the guests knew how to pay their respects to a cat. There was one knowledgeable guest, however, who approached the mantelpiece with a proper attitude of respect.

7 "You are a living sculpture," said the man.

8 "That's Phut Phat," said One.

9 "He is obviously a champion," said the man.

10 "Yes, he could probably win a few ribbons, but he's strictly a pet. He never goes out, except in his cage on the fire escape."

11 "A cage?" said the man. "I should like such a thing for my cat. May I inspect this cage before I leave?"

Phut Phat Concentrates

by Lilian Jackson Braun



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- 12 "Of course. It's just outside the library window."
- 13 "You have a most attractive home," he continued. "I have noticed you collect silver."
- 14 "Why, yes. And apparently you know silver yourself, because your cane is a rare piece. Would you like to see my silver collection downstairs?" asked One.
- 15 At this point Phut Phat, aware that the conversation no longer revolved around him, went upstairs to the guest room to sleep.
- 16 After this upset in the household routine, Phut Phat needed a rest, and so the following week was a sleepy blur. But soon it was Sunday again, and everyone was sitting around being pleasantly routine.
- 17 "John," said One, "who was that charming man with the silver cane at our party?"
- 18 "I thought he was someone you invited," said Two.
- 19 "He must have come with one of the other guests. At any rate, he was interested in getting a cage like ours for his own cat. And did I tell you the Hendersons have two Burmese kittens?"
- 20 Another week passed, and it was Sunday again. One and Two were going out to see the Burmese kittens, and so Phut Phat fell asleep on the library sofa. When the telephone rang and wakened him, it was dark and he was alone. He raised his head and chattered at the instrument; then he went back to sleep.
- 21 When Phut Phat awoke a little later, he sensed that something was wrong. Someone was on the fire escape. Petrified, he watched as the window opened and a dark figure slipped into the room. With one lightning glide Phut Phat sprang to the top of a tall chest.
- 22 The figure in the window advanced craftily toward the hall, and Phut Phat recognized the man with the shiny stick. With graceful steps the man moved downstairs; and when he reappeared, he was carrying a bulky load. Then he crept to the third-floor bedroom. After a few minutes he reappeared and approached the chest where Phut Phat crouched. Phut Phat felt a powerful urge to attack, and yet a fearful dismay.
- 23 "Get him!" commanded something within him.
- 24 "Stay!" warned the fright throbbing in his head.
- 25 "Get him! NOW!"
- 26 Phut Phat sprang at the man's head, ripping with razor claws wherever they sank into flesh.
- 27 The scream that came from the intruder was like an electric shock. It sent Phut Phat sailing through space—up the stairs—into the bedroom—under the bed.
- 28 When One and Two came home they found Phut Phat still cowering under the bed. While One comforted Phut Phat, Two called the police. One continued to hold Phut Phat in her arms even after two strange men were admitted to the house. They asked questions and examined all the rooms.
- 29 "Everything is insured," One told them, "but the silver is irreplaceable."
- 30 "Have you noticed any strange incidents lately?" asked the detective.
- 31 "Well, several times recently when the phone has rung and we answered it, there was no one on the line," said One. She gazed into Phut Phat's eyes and added, "If only Phuffy could tell us who was here."
- 32 Phut Phat stared at One's forehead.
- 33 "I wish I could be more helpful," One apologized.
- 34 Phut Phat gave up, and, wriggling free, he jumped down from One's lap. He knew who it was—the man with the shiny stick! Phut Phat decided to try with Two. He froze in his position of concentration, staring at Two's forehead.
- 35 "Wait a minute," said Two, coming out of a puzzled silence. "I just thought of something. There was a guest at a party that we couldn't account for—a man with a silver cane."
- 36 "Of course, lieutenant! He was terribly interested in our silver," One added.
- 37 "Does that suggest anything to you, lieutenant?" Two asked.
- 38 "Yes, it does," the detective said grimly. "We know his method, but we didn't know he was operating in this area again."
- 39 Phut Phat arched his body in a long, luxurious stretch and walked from the room. He felt relaxed and satisfied, for he had made vital contact with a human mind, and perhaps—after all—there was hope.

How Well Did You Read?

Write the letter of the phrase that answers the question or completes the statement best.

- 1 Who were the three *main* characters in the story?
 - a A cat, a burglar, and a police officer
 - b A man, a woman, and a burglar
 - c A cat, a woman, and a man
- 2 Phut Phat felt that people were a poor breed because they
 - a could not see in the dark
 - b ate and drank strange things
 - c had only five senses
 - d All of the above
- 3 The guest with the cane asked to see the cat's cage. What was his real reason for that?
 - a He wanted to buy one like it for his cat.
 - b He wanted to look around the house.
 - c He thought he'd like to build a fire escape onto his house.
- 4 Phut Phat concentrated on the people he lived with because he
 - a thought he might be able to figure them out that way
 - b enjoyed staring at them and thinking about them
 - c believed he could send his thoughts to them

The sentences below describe events in the story. Put the four events in the correct order by lettering each one *a*, *b*, *c*, or *d*.

- 5 Phut Phat sprang at the robber's head.
- 6 The telephone rang and wakened Phut Phat.
- 7 One and Two went to see the Burmese kittens.
- 8 A dark figure opened the window and entered the room.

Write the letter of the best answer for the question.

- 9 What seems to be the author's opinion of cats?
 - a Cats are awful animals, capable of doing harmful things.
 - b Cats are superior animals, capable of doing amazing things.
 - c Cats are silly animals, capable of doing very little.

Learn about Words

Vocabulary

- A You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 mixtures of many things (1)
- 2 send; pass on (1)
- 3 turning; turning for help (1)
- 4 made up; formed (2)
- 5 hardly (5)
- 6 correct (6)
- 7 frozen with fear (21)
- 8 crouching in fear (28)

- B A word may have more than one meaning.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** below is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning *a*, *b*, or *c*. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 9 **disturbing** (3)
 - a breaking in with noise
 - b annoying
 - c putting out of order
- 10 **line** (31)
 - a wrinkle
 - b telephone wire
 - c row

Word Study

C Lurlene **should have come** with us.

The words in **heavy type** are a verb phrase. A verb phrase consists of the main verb of a sentence and any helping verbs that help the main verb express action or make a statement. Read the sentences below. If the words in **heavy type** make up a verb phrase, write *Yes*. If they do not make up a verb phrase, write *No*.

- 11 Willy and Fran **are leaving** the house.
- 12 The horse galloped **through the field**.
- 13 I **had to come** home.
- 14 Sonia **wants to come** with us.
- 15 **The flowers** will freeze overnight.
- 16 If it rains we **will have to stay** home.
- 17 **My mother** permitted me to go.
- 18 **The soup** is heating slowly.

D Betty **does read** fast.
Joe **has gone** away.
Maisie **won't be coming** today.

The words in **heavy type** are verb phrases (verbs of more than one word). Each verb phrase is made up of one or more *helping verbs* and a *main verb*. The helping verbs come first. The main verb is the last word in the verb phrase. Thus the main verbs above are *read*, *gone*, and *coming*. The verb phrases in the sentences below are in **heavy type**. If the underlined words are helping verbs, write *HV*. If they are main verbs, write *MV*.

- 19 Who **is watching** the roast?
- 20 Paula did **burst** that balloon.
- 21 The dog has **buried** the bone.
- 22 I do **like** your new dress.
- 23 This pencil **is worn** to a stub.
- 24 Colin has **broken** his bike.
- 25 I did **dust** the furniture yesterday.
- 26 Sol will **go** home tomorrow.

E Sentences have patterns. Here are sentences in four different patterns:

1. N-V: John ran.
(Noun) (Verb)
2. N-V-N: Sarah has shoes.
(Noun) (Verb) (Noun)
3. N-LV-N: Susan is a doctor.
(Noun) (Linking Verb) (Noun)
4. N-LV-Adj: Melvin is tall.
(Noun) (Linking Verb) (Adjective)

Compare the sentences below with the examples. Decide which pattern is used in each sentence. (Remember that *am*, *are*, *is*, *was*, and *were* are linking verbs.) Write *N-V*, *N-V-N*, *N-LV-N*, or *N-LV-Adj*.

- 27 The horse bucked.
- 28 This fruit is sour.
- 29 Morris is a cat.
- 30 Tyrone rode a bus.
- 31 That noise is loud.
- 32 Alex peeled the potatoes.
- 33 My pet is a lizard.

Use Your Imagination

Write another ending for the story about Phut Phat. Tell how Phut Phat helped the police find the thief.