

38. The Magic Kettle

(A tanuki is a small, furry, dog-like animal found in Japan. There are many imaginary stories about this playful little animal. It is believed in the stories that a tanuki can take the shape of any thing or any animal. Here is a story about a tanuki and a pedlar called Jimmu.)



Once in the country of Japan, there lived an old man. He lived in a beautiful house high up in the mountains. He was proud of his house with its white straw mats and pretty papered walls. In warm weather, he slid back the walls to let the smell of the trees and the flowers come in.

One day, he was standing looking at the mountain opposite, when he heard a kind of rumbling noise in the room behind him. He turned around and saw a rusty old iron kettle in a corner. How the kettle got there, the old man did not know, but he picked it up and looked it over carefully.

“That’s a piece of luck,” he said, smiling to himself. “My old kettle was getting worn out and this looks like a good kettle.”

He filled the new kettle with water and put it on the fire. As soon as the water in the kettle began to get warm, a strange thing happened. The man thought he must be dreaming. The handle of the kettle slowly changed its shape and became a head. The spout grew into a tail. Out of the body of the kettle, sprang four paws. In a few minutes, the man was watching, not a kettle, but a tanuki !



The tanuki jumped off the fire and bounded about the room like a kitten. It ran up the pretty papered walls and even across the ceiling. The old man could not catch it. He called his neighbour for help. Somehow they caught the tanuki and shut it up in a wooden chest. Running after the tanuki had made them both very tired. They sat down on the mat to rest.

“What shall I do with this naughty animal ? I don’t want to keep it in the house.” said the old man.

“Why don’t you sell it off to Jimmu, the pedlar?” the neighbour suggested.

“That’s a good idea!” said the old man.

So, they sent for Jimmu. When he came, the old man went to the chest and lifted the lid very very carefully. But there was no tanuki inside, only the old, rusty kettle the old man had found. He did not now want to keep the kettle. He gave it away to Jimmu without taking any money for it.

Jimmu put the kettle in his cloth bag and started off home. He felt that his bag was getting heavier and heavier on the way. But he did not put it down. On reaching home, Jimmu put the bag away carefully in a corner.

At night when Jimmu was fast asleep he heard a sudden noise and woke up. He could not see anything but he thought he heard some noises in the corner. When he lit the lamp, he saw that the kettle had turned into a tanuki once again. It was running round chasing its own tail. It ran here and there and jumped and turned somersaults. Jimmu sat watching the tanuki for a long time. Then he fell asleep.

When he got up in the morning, he saw that the tanuki had not run away. The old kettle was still there lying in a corner. He picked it up lovingly.



“Do you wish to stay with me, tanuki?” he asked.

To his surprise, the tanuki answered in a human voice. “I’ll stay with you and make you very rich. You can show me around. People will give a lot of money to see a kettle turn into a tanuki and dance.”

So that’s what they did. Jimmu set up a booth with a platform. He put the kettle on the platform. At his command, the kettle turned into a tanuki. At Jimmu’s commands, the little furry animal would then walk, run, jump, leap, turn somersaults or dance. People loved to see the kettle change into a playful little animal that could do all this. They paid Jimmu well to see the show. Big crowds of people came to watch the show. And the dear little tanuki never disappointed them. Merrily, it danced many dances – the shadow dance, the fan dance, the umbrella dance. It never tired of dancing.

Soon, Jimmu had collected lots and lots of money. He had become a very rich man. He said to the tanuki, “Dear tanuki, you have made me very rich. We can both live in comfort now. We can stop the shows if you like.”

So, they decided to stop the shows. But Jimmu did not forget the old man who had given him the magic kettle. He gave some of the money to the old man. All of them lived long and happy lives. Jimmu and the old man are no more but you may still come across the magic kettle lying in a corner somewhere in Japan.



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- **rusty** : old, covered with rust - the reddish layer that forms on old iron articles.
 - **bounded about** : jumped high here and there.
 - **pedlar** : a person who sells things from door to door.
 - **booth** : small tent or building in a market.
 - **merrily** : in a happy, cheerful way.
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Things to do :

1. Answer the following questions :
 - (a) Why was the old man proud of his house ? Describe his house.
 - (b) What did the old man find in his house one day ?
 - (c) Why did he decide to keep the old kettle ?
 - (d) What happened to the kettle when it was put on the fire ?
 - (e) What did the tanuki tell Jimmu ?
 - (f) Why did Jimmu decide to stop the shows ?
2. Describe the 'Tanuki Show' in your own words.
3. What reasons can you think of for the following :
 - * The kettle turned into a tanuki when it was put on the fire.
 - * The tanuki decided to stay with Jimmu.
4. Find the smaller words hidden in the following words :
carefully, lovingly, furry, playful, somewhere.
5. What would have happened had the old man kept the tanuki ? Write in short.



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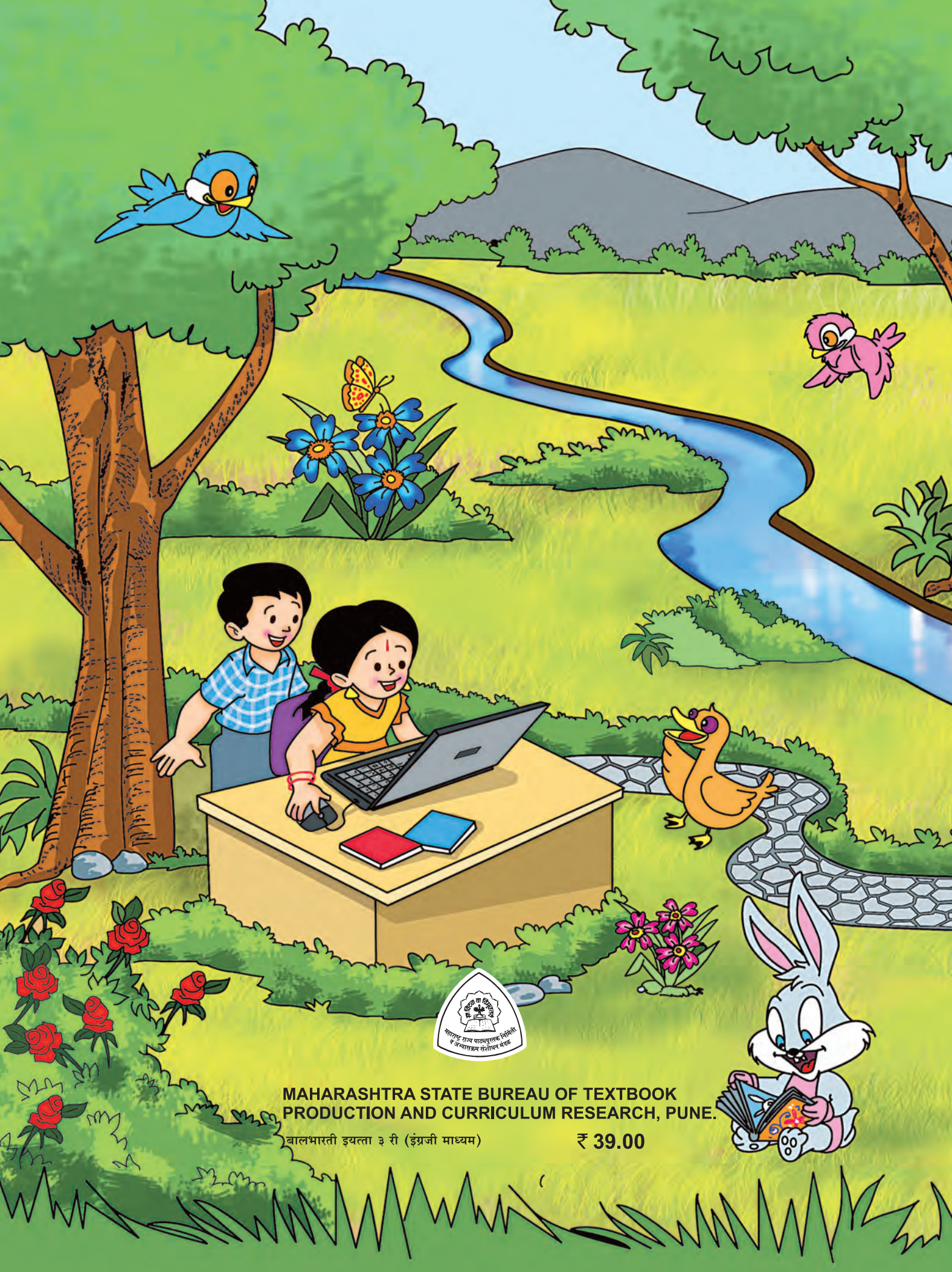
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