



The Mystery of the Cyber Friend

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Level 4



Shree lives in an apartment in a small town called Katpadi Junction.

Amma works in a jewellery shop. Appa works as a taxi driver. They want her to learn computers. So they are pleased that she likes to use it.

The computer is Shree's friend. She always finds time for it. She uses it to find information for school projects and send e-mails.



Shree's aunt also stays with them. Everyone calls her Akka. Most of the time, she naps in front of the TV that shows her favourite old films. She gives Shree hot dosas stuffed with spicy noodles.

After tiffin, Shree likes to play. Not the traditional games that Akka likes to play, with stones and shells. Shree likes to play games on the computer.



The computer doesn't just have games. It also has FriendsNet.

Shree joined it two months ago, on her thirteenth birthday. After snacks and tea, she chats with her school friends through FriendsNet. They tell each other what they did since they met last, on the school bus.

Shree says that she got extra sugar with her tea. One friend says, "That you get every day."

Shree says, "And I also got mutton-flavoured noodles with my dosa."

Another friend teases, "Do you do anything other than eating?"

Shree gets angry.
She decides to unfriend them.
Afterwards, she misses them.

But before she can tell them she's sorry,
she gets a new friend request.

It is from a girl called Chaitra.
She is very pretty, like a film star.

**You have a
friend request
from Chaitra**



ACCEPT

REFUS

E





Shree clicks ACCEPT. One click, and they become friends.

Chaitra types, “Do you have many friends?”

“No! And I lost a few friends today.” She adds a sad-face emoticon.

“So what? It really doesn’t matter how many friends you have—it is the nature of our friendship that matters. And you have me now!”

Shree likes the sound of that.



“Where do you go to school?” types Shree.

“Near your school,” types Chaitra.

“How do you know which school I go to?” wonders Shree.

“Because it is near my school.”

“That’s nice. Then we can meet,” types Shree.

Chaitra signs off. “Yes! And we’ll be best friends forever. Bye!”



The next morning, Shree looks for a school near hers. But she cannot see one. It is a little strange that she hasn't heard of any other school nearby.

But Chaitra is nicer than all her other friends. She is Shree's special friend and nobody else's friend.



Today she doesn't touch the hot noodles, though they are her favourite flavour-chilli chicken.

Akka wonders what is wrong. "Are you feeling unwell?"

"Too much school work," lies Shree.

"Then go and finish your homework, while I take my nap," says her aunt.

But Shree doesn't do her homework. Instead, she starts the computer, goes online and waits for her new friend to ping her.

Soon she gets a message from Chaitra.



“Hello, friend. How are you today?”

“I’m fine, I didn’t eat my tiffin,” types Shree.

“Why?” types Chaitra.





“Because I wanted to talk to you. So I finished tea quickly,” types Shree.

“Great. Now can you send me a selfie? And give me your number so I can call you,” types Chaitra.

“I don’t have a camera phone,” types Shree and feels sad.



Chaitra offers to give Shree her old camera phone.

“Let us meet on Sunday. Then I will take your snap. And give you my old phone.”

Shree has always wished for a phone with a camera. She types, “Where shall we meet?”

Chaitra types, “Come to the railway station.”

Shree asks, “What time?”

Chaitra decides, “When the Bengaluru train reaches there.”



Akka comes into the room just then to clean it.

“What are you doing, Shree?”

“I have a new friend, Akka!” Akka looks over Shree's shoulder at Chaitra's profile picture.

“But that's the film actress I like so much, Madhoo. She's your friend?”

“Yes, but her name is Chaitra.”



Akka laughs and shakes her head. “That’s Madhoo, I’ve seen all her films. She must be so old now.”

“She’s the same age as me!” insists Shree.

“No, no, she’s as old as I am,” says Akka.

“That snap was taken when she was still in school. It is from her first movie.”

Shree is angry with Akka, then stops to think.

Is Chaitra using someone else’s picture—
a film star’s?





“How old are you?” she types.

“I told you I’m thirteen, the same age as you,”
Chaitra types back.

Shree replies, “That is good. Best friends
should be the same age.”

“Hey, the earrings in your profile picture are
so pretty!” types Shree.

“Thanks, I made them myself.”

“Wow. Wear them when we meet tomorrow!”

“Okay, but only if you come alone,”
says Chaitra.

“Why?” types Shree.

“Because I am coming alone too! To our
secret meeting!”

Shree is typing 'Okay' when she remembers something.
"Hey Chaitra, I haven't seen any other school near our school."
But Chaitra has gone offline.

Is there something strange about her new friend?
Has she been lying?





Shree is very confused and cannot focus on her homework.

“Akka?” she asks.

“Yes, my dear,” says Akka, “what is worrying you?”

Shree decides to be honest and tells her all about her new friend who is lying.

“Akka, what should I do?”



The next day, Shree and Akka reach Katpadi Junction much before the arrival of the Bengaluru Express. They have a secret plan to find out if the new friend is honest or not.

Akka says, "I will go and talk to the station manager so he can help us."

The train from Bengaluru is coming in. Shree looks all around. She can't remember whether Chaitra had asked her to wait inside the station or outside.

Where did Akka go?

She can't see her anywhere.





Many passengers come out of the train. None look like Chaitra.

A man who's her father's age walks towards Shree.

He is smiling. "Hello Shree!" Shree is shocked. She doesn't know him.

"It is so nice to see you!" he says.

"Who...who are you—you are not Cha...Chaitra!" stutters Shree.



“No. But I am an uncle and would like to be your friend, Shree. I like to make friends with young girls,” says the uncle-who-is-not-Chaitra.

“Eeeeeeee!” shrieks Shree. Akka is beside her in a second, along with the station manager.

The uncle-who-is-not-Chaitra is surprised. He didn’t expect that Shree would bring two grown-ups with her.



Akka hits him with her handbag.

Then she yells, "Don't you dare come near my niece!"

"Owww!" he cries.

Just then the train moves. He runs towards a bogey door. The station manager rushes forward to catch the man. But he disappears into the crowded train.

They all go to the police station.

“You are a brave pair!” says a policewoman. “Thank you for informing us about this imposter. Shree, you were clever to confide in a trusted adult! Will you put up this poster about cyber security in your school, please? We would also like to conduct a cyber safety class in your school.”

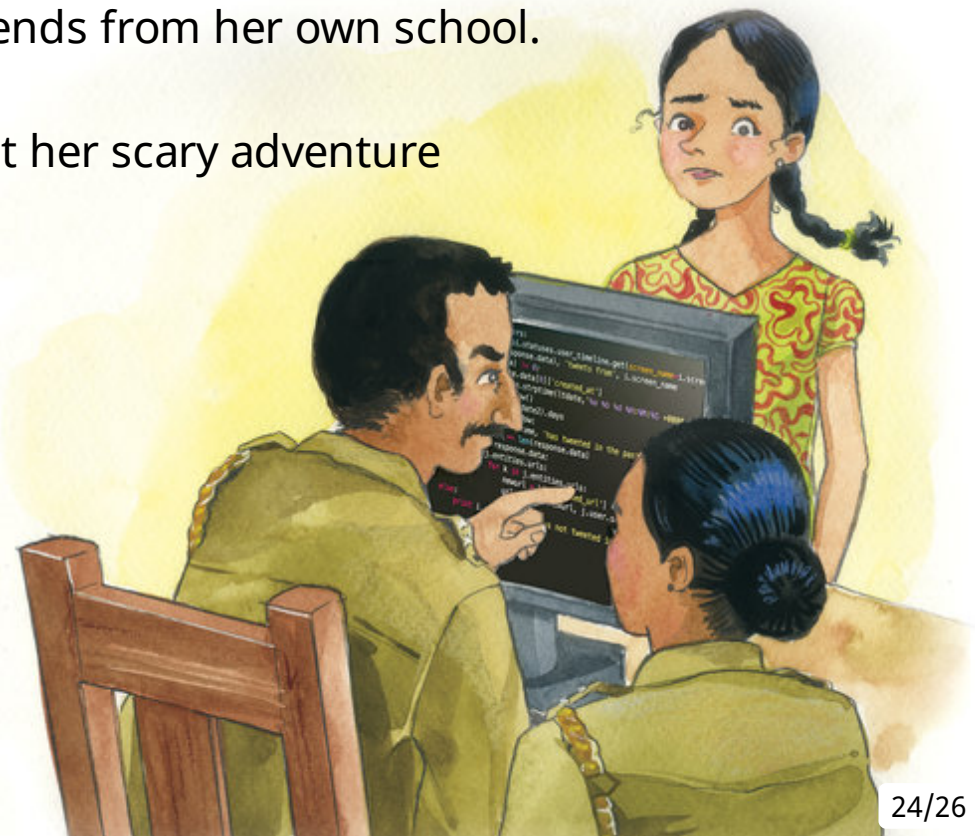
She says an expert from the Cyber Crime Cell will need to take a look at Shree’s computer.



The next day, a cyber crime officer goes through Shree's computer. Within hours, the police find the man who pretended to be Chaitra.

They nab him from his office in Bengaluru and find that he has been trying to befriend many young girls and boys on social media. Shree decides to only have friends from her own school.

She can't wait to tell her friends about her scary adventure with her cyber 'friend'.

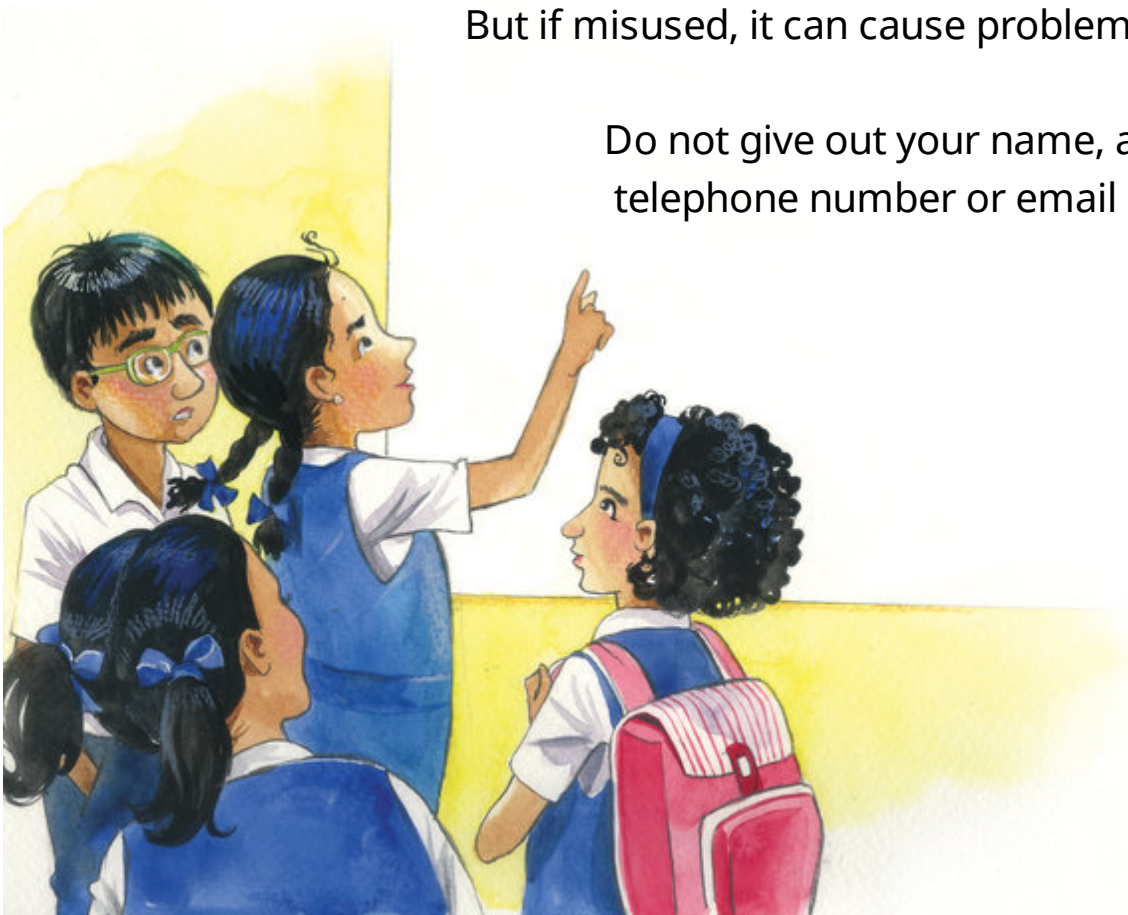


Be safe online!

The Child Helpline telephone number in India is 1098.

The Internet has many uses and is a wonderful technology. But if misused, it can cause problems too. Use the Internet wisely.

Do not give out your name, address, school name, telephone number or email id to strangers online.



Do not send your photograph to anyone online without first checking with your parents or guardians.

Do not respond to messages that make you uncomfortable.

Never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone you only know online without telling your parents or guardians. Remember that people online may not be who they seem to be.



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The Mystery of the Cyber Friend

(English)

Shree loves learning new things on the computer. It has games and it has social media sites! She is thrilled to make a new friend on one such site. But is this friend lying to her? Find out for yourself in this cyber thriller.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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