The doorbell rang TRRINGGG! Om opened the door.

"Hello Om!" said Shiv, smiling broadly. He held a big bag full of fresh vegetables.

"How lovely to see you!" said Om, hugging his twin brother. "Come right in."

Shiv was a farmer. He lived fifty kilometres from the city and grew rice, wheat and vegetables. Om owned a pet food shop. He made and sold special food for dogs, cats, rabbits, parrots and monkeys.

He also looked after people's pets while they were out of town.

"You don't look very well," Shiv said to Om when they were having a cup of tea. "What's the matter?"

"I have had fever for a week," admitted Om. "This morning I tidied up the whole shop and I am exhausted."

"You need a rest," said Shiv. "Go to my farm for a few days. You know how quiet and peaceful it is. There isn't even a telephone to disturb you. I'll look after your shop till you feel better. Most people will think I'm you anyway!"
The following morning Om left for Shiv's farm. Before going he told Shiv how to feed Frisky the dog, Rani the cat and Chulbul the talking parrot who had been left in his care for a few days.

"Relax and enjoy yourself! We'll be fine here," called Shiv as he waved good-bye to his brother.

"Here – here – here," squawked Chulbul, perching on Shiv's shoulder and gently pecking his ear.

"Hello Chulbul!" said Shiv, stroking the parrot's wings. "You can stay out of your cage but don't fly out of the house, okay?"

"Okay – okay – okay," squawked the parrot.
Shiv fed Frisky, Rani and Chulbul in the middle room, which was the pets' room. Then he went to the front room, which was the shop, to get some special food for them. The special foods were in five large jars on a shelf behind the counter. Om was famous all over town for these special foods.

Both pets and owners loved them. They kept the pets happy, strong and healthy.

Shiv measured out two teaspoons from the first jar into a blue bowl for Frisky the dog; two teaspoons from the second jar into a red bowl for Rani the cat; and one teaspoon out of the fourth jar into a tiny pink bowl for Chulbul the parrot. He carried the bowls to the pets' room where Frisky and Rani licked up all their special food. Chulbul started pecking at his portion.

"Eat it up!" said Shiv. "It's good for you."

He went back into the shop and pulled off the new white labels which Om had stuck rather crookedly on the five jars.
“Coloured labels will look much better,” he said to himself, “and they will be easier to recognize.”

He put all the jars together on the counter and dusted the shelf. He cut five fresh labels of different colours from an old magazine. Then, as Om had done, with a black pen he drew a tiny figure on each label. On the first one he carefully drew a monkey. On the second label he drew a parrot, and then a little cat.

As he did so, he heard strange soft sounds from the pets’ room.

“Just coming!” he called out. “I’m just coming!”

He quickly drew a rabbit on the fourth label, a dog on the fifth.

“CHEEAOW! CHEEEAOWWW!”

What was that?

With nervous fingers Shiv stuck the coloured labels on the jars, replaced the jars on the shelf and ran to the pets’ room to see what was wrong.
Good heavens! Frisky the dog had the face of a rabbit! He was twitching his nose, growling softly and looking surprised!

Rani the cat had a monkey’s face with long cat’s ears. “Cheeaow! Cheeeaaowww!” she chattered and miaowed.

“Miaow – miaow – miaow!” said Chulbul the parrot, landing on Shiv’s shoulder. He had a cat’s face with a parrot’s beak!

Shiv was thunderstruck! What had happened? The three pets had been fine when he fed them their special foods. Something had happened after that. But what?
Oh no! Could the special foods have got mixed up so that Frisky got rabbit food, Rani got monkey food and Chulbul got cat food? Om was ill when he tidied the shop and stuck new white labels crookedly on the jars. Maybe, just maybe, he labelled the jars wrong!

"I must put all three of you right before your owners come to get you. Or they will get the shock of their lives!" said Shiv.

"Miaow—miaow—miaow," said Chulbul, nodding his head.

"I know what!" said Shiv. "I can put at least one of you right straightaway! Chulbul, you got a cat's face after eating special food from the jar with a parrot on its label. Aha! So that jar contains cat food!"

He ran to the shop and measured out two teaspoons of special food from the jar with a parrot on its coloured label. Then he ran back to the pets' room and fed Rani. As he watched Rani's tail grew long and curly!

"Cheeaow! Wow-wow-wow!" she said and wagged her new tail!

"Grrrr!" Frisky growled at this strange new animal — part dog, part monkey, and part cat!
“My God!” groaned Shiv. “What have I done? I must also have labelled the jars wrong when I was sticking on coloured labels. Now the jars are really, really mixed up!”

“Really—really—really,” squawked Chulbul.

Rani stopped wagging her new tail. She lay at Shiv’s feet, looking very sick.

“Oh Rani, I’m so sorry!” said Shiv, picking her up and stroking her gently.

“Just be patient. I’ll sort this out.”

Rani licked his hand and looked at him trustingly.

“I know what!” said Shiv. “I’ll feed Frisky the special food I fed you.” But first he went into the back room and tucked Rani into his own bed. Then he ran to the shop, measured out another two teaspoons of special food from the jar with a parrot on its coloured label and returned to the pets’ room. He fed Frisky the special food and waited anxiously.

As Frisky ate the special food, his rabbit face began to change. His ears flopped. His nose grew longer. Frisky was all dog once again! Shiv was so
delighted that he caught hold of Frisky’s front paws and danced with him around the room!

Then he rushed to the shop, pulled off the coloured label with a parrot on it, stuck a new white label on the jar and drew a dog on the label. He pulled off the other coloured labels too since they were all wrong anyway. But at least the first jar was now correctly labelled.

"Bhiow! Bhowaow!" Poor sick Rani was making strange sad noises in Shiv’s bed. He ran to the back room, cradled Rani in his arms and walked up and down the room, thinking furiously. Which of the four unlabelled jars contained cat food?

“Oh God!” he prayed. “Please help me. Don’t let this little creature die.”

TRRRINGGGG!

Shiv went to answer the doorbell. “Good morning Omji,” said a man with a big, fierce dog. “I’m going out of town for two days. Please look after this chap till then, as you always do.” He handed the dog’s leash to Shiv and went away. Shiv shut the front door. Before he could lock it, the big dog started growling and jumping at the sick creature in Shiv’s arms.

“Stop it, you silly fellow!” scolded Shiv, holding Rani with one hand and trying to push the dog away with the other.
Frisky had been dozing peacefully in the pets' room. He woke up and rushed into the shop, barking furiously.

"Stop it Frisky, stop it!" yelled Shiv, turning and twisting to avoid the big dog.

"Stop it - stop it - stop it," squawked Chulbul, flying all over the room. "Pit - pit - pit!"

Shiv let go of the dog's leash, held Rani up with both hands and went behind the counter. Barking and jumping, the big dog followed. He hit the shelf and one of the unlabelled jars toppled over and opened.

"Now look what you've done!" said Shiv. He placed Rani gently on the counter, grabbed the big dog's leash, took the dog to the pets' room and tied him up in one corner. In the opposite corner he tied up Frisky who was still barking.

He came back to the shop to see Rani licking up a little bit of special food that had fallen out of the open jar onto the counter.
“Oh God! Now what?” Shiv was terrified. As he watched with a hammering heart, Rani’s monkey face changed into a cat’s face. Her tail became a cat’s tail once again. Purring loudly she jumped off the counter and wound herself around Shiv’s legs.

What luck! What relief! Rani was all cat again! Shiv picked her up and hugged her. Then he closed the fallen jar, placed it second in line on the shelf, stuck a new white label on it and drew a cat on the label.

“Stop it – stop it – stop it!” Chulbul was back on Shiv’s shoulder.

“Hello! You rascal!” Shiv said affectionately, “I must attend to you now.” He opened the three unlabelled jars and looked inside. The special foods in the
three jars looked very similar, except that one powder was much finer than the other two and one powder was much coarser. Which one was parrot food?

Suddenly Shiv remembered that Om had noted down the recipes of his special foods in a register. Perhaps he had noted down their textures too. Shiv searched high and low in the pets’ room. But there was no register. Could it be in the shop?

He went back. Something was moving inside one of the three jars that he had left open on the counter.

“Chulbul you rascal!” Shiv lifted the parrot out of the jar and dusted off the coarsest powder. Chulbul now had the body of a rabbit! He looked at Shiv sadly, shivered and closed his eyes.

“Don’t die, you naughty creature, don’t die!” Shiv wept. Quickly he shut and replaced the three jars on the shelf. Then he tucked the sick parrot into his own bed and continued to search frantically for the register. Shiv was desperate. Now he knew that either the finest or the less fine powder was parrot food. But which one?

TRRRINGGG! TTRRRRINGGGG! TTRRRRINGGGG!

Someone was at the front door. Shiv hurried from the back room to the shop to see who it was. A boy stood at the door with a monkey on his shoulder.
“Sir I rang the bell many times,” said the boy. “You didn’t come. Then I realized that the door wasn’t locked so I came in and took some special food for my monkey. Here is the money for it. Sir, I hope you don’t mind.”

Shiv shook his head and took the money. I must have forgotten to lock the front door after the big dog came in, he thought.

He looked at the boy in alarm. “Have you already fed your monkey?” he asked.

“Yes Sir,” said the boy. “He wouldn’t wait till we reached home. He gobbled up the special food the moment I took it out of the jar!”

“Which jar was that?” asked Shiv, trying not to look nervous.

“The last one Sir, in which you always keep monkey food. Bye bye Sir.” The boy left the shop with a happy, healthy monkey on his shoulder.

Shiv’s problem was solved! He took a spoon of special food from the second last jar on the shelf and rushed to the back room. Little by little he fed the sick parrot. As he watched anxiously, Chulbul’s rabbit body turned green and sprouted wings. His cat face changed and once again he was all parrot!
“Hello – hello – hello!” he said, flying out of bed to perch on Shiv’s shoulder. “Miaow – miaow – miaow!”

“Don’t you tease me now,” laughed Shiv. “Thank God the mix-up is over! What a story to tell Om when he returns!”

With Chulbul on his shoulder, Shiv finished labelling the last three jars correctly. Then he made himself a well-earned cup of tea and sat down to enjoy it!
WHAT A
MIX-UP!

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