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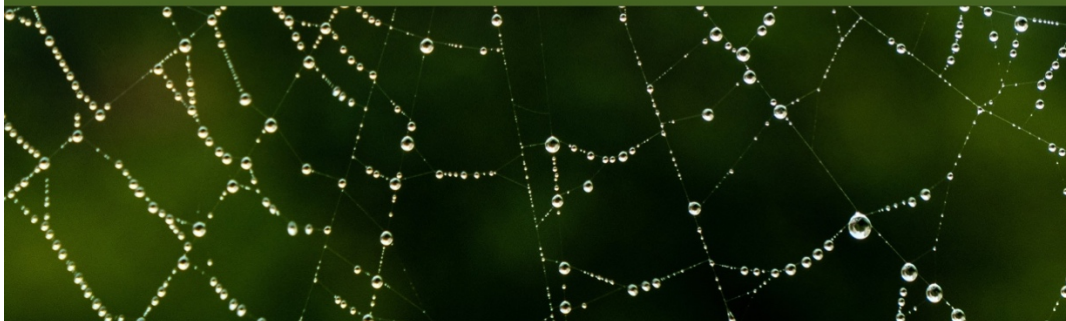
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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FEAR STUDIES

Theme: Navigating Ecofear through Diverse Cultures

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B. CREATIVE WORKS

Experiential Fictional Stories

Hydrophobia—The Water That I Dread!

Deborah, S. Susan

In the rainy and stormy monsoon season of 2018, I found a home when I was barely 33 days old. It's a lovely memory if not for the monsoons which always evoke a sense of dread in me. It's monsoon now and though I enjoy my walks with my curly-haired mamma, I detest the puddles which appear and reappear in the course of our walks. My inherent child-like human seems to be fascinated with water and somehow forces me to either jump on the puddle or walk through it; my adult-self's nemesis! My human pappa who is also equally fond of water like my mamma takes special glee in threatening me with bathing every time he feels like it. Mean! I mean they know that our species has a certain disdain for water and overhearing the human read from her black box,(Laptop) that it is enough that I am bathed once a month. But my human parents don't pay any heed to that and bathe me or at least force-bathe me once a week!

My bath times are a blur. I am carried by force after trying to escape the clutches of my human (either man or woman). After all, where could I run, except round and round the drawing room which is no daunting task for my humans. But I must admit that I enjoy it when they carry me and I wish it was forever! But alas! The bathroom—cold and watery—drives me into a great dread! How I dislike water! Thankfully my humans use warm water which makes it bearable for me. Imagine cold water being poured over the body. I patiently await the bathing time to be over. But no! Shampoo once, then again and then scrubbing—prolonging the time of my misery. And in case it's my pappa, I have to wait until he bathes me with warm water. I wait for him to rub me with a dry towel which seems like forever. Fighting off my claustrophobia, I bide my time till the bathroom door opens. Once open, I run out of the bathroom into freedom and wriggle myself free of the water droplets. When my human parents took me to Kerala with them, there was a cage kept for the likes of me. I'm glad that I wasn't put into it. I think the bathing experience inside the closed bathroom doors would seem like that cage I had seen in Kerala. I'm happy that my parents don't lock me into that closed space. I would rather move about freely at home in Goa.

Autonomy is confined in the way I choose my position while sleeping but that comes with limitations as well—while I could choose my sleeping position, the place is not what I could possibly choose—I would love to snuggle in the bed along with my humans but alas, that is something I don't get too often and if I do get, I have to compromise on my position.

These days I have the company of my human parents almost always and that is something I wholeheartedly enjoy albeit a small fear of regular bathing. But I guess I can be assured that bathing me regularly is not a priority in their agenda as much as cooking and cuddling me is! But if at all, I'm carried off for bathing, it is a warm and long one which is enjoyable and fearful in equal measures. I enjoy the soaping and shampooing part while hugging my human tight but still afraid of the water that would be splashed across my body. But something else has been added to my routine these days—after our walks, my mamma washes my paws with something added to water. This is something which I don't like but now it has become a usual process. I bear this since it is only my paws and not my entire body! Listen to this. Two days ago my humans were curiously discussing an article of 'Rajapalayam dogs.' I perked my ears up to listen carefully. And what do I hear?—"Rajapalayam dogs don't like water and detest bathing." See, see, I was right all along. All along I had been imagining that I was the only one hydrophobic but this article showed the light. BUT my parents don't understand this. My fear means nothing to them. All they could possibly recognize in this bathing situation is my peculiar smell and colour which does not sit well with them.

"...not subject to bathing, the bathroom seems like a safe space..."

The monsoon is long gone and my walks are becoming something that I look forward to given the dry roads and no puddles. I have started resuming my air-sniffing and butterfly chasing alternatives to continually navigating puddles and muddy waters. I've even started socializing with Brownie, Leo, Tofu, Nira and Bolu, who are my human parents' friends' dogs on the campus. Though I like seeing them, when they get close to me, I don't enjoy it; thus, retreating by growling and barking.

It's February now and the weather is pleasant but it did rain one evening. In February, I cannot imagine rain but when I went for a walk with my mamma, I loved the cool breeze and the wet roads. These days I even venture into the bathroom—once my dreaded space, to check on my mamma and for hidden treats which my papa places to make me forget my fear of the bathing space. As long as I'm not subject to bathing, the bathroom seems like a safe space for me because of my papa who often hides treats there and I go there to find and eat them.

My human parents are quite busy these days which in one way is good for me because there is paucity of time for my time-consuming bathing. I'm enjoying the relaxed ambience without danger of being drenched in water, hoping that these blissful days would remain forever. However, I am cheated into consuming water by my parents. Ask me how? They seem to be adding a lot of water to my food and even milk—I love food and perhaps they find that is one way of feeding me water! Of course, I cannot complain because I am not forced to walk or bathe in water and that is something that I cherish.

Until the next bathing—I'm happy.
