



A World Without Cages

○ Sujata Ray

ONE summer morning, on my way to Binsar, I came across a small sanctuary in the Kumaon. We all got out of the jeep in order to enter the tiny roadside zoo. The darkly forested Himalayas were spread all around me, with indescribable majesty. The morning sunlight glowed and smiled on the bright green of the pine needles. The world had ceased to exist beyond the circle of the Himalayas, and for me nothing mattered but this moment that I shared with the mountains.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a small monkey. He caught my attention when he flung himself upon the wire mesh of his cage. Suddenly the forest hushed and stilled. The monkey was crying – he made a low sound of anguish and grief as he threw himself against the walls of his prison. Then he flung himself on the ground and put his head between his knees. I felt as if I were watching a baby in pain. As we crowded around his cage, he rushed towards us, only to collapse again on the floor. His low moaning cries continued. Such restless agony was painful to witness. I moved away to speak to a man employed to look after the animals. He told me that the monkey had been there for five or six months but was unable to adjust to being imprisoned.

How long would this monkey survive in a cage? Even if he did, never again would he feel the freshness of the wind on his face as he flung himself from branch to branch. He might cry and moan all day, yet no one would pay attention. This corner of the Kumaon is deserted and isolated. He will live out his life in pain and misery. And for what? So that a chance passerby, on a whim, may stare at him through the mesh?

We, with our divine rights, are capable of bullying and breaking every other creature on earth, but are we not able to exercise this power judiciously? What right have we to pit our brains against these creatures of the wild? Must we put these creatures of the wild in cages so that we can stare and gape at them? Who gave us the sanction to deny them their birthright for freedom and subject them to this fate worse than death? Why do humans think they have a divine right to bully and break the spirit of every other creature on earth?

Since my encounter with this monkey, every time I see a little creature going about its business, I think to myself, “Thank God it is free. Thank God it has been spared.”

Having driven most species to near extinction, we now find it necessary to begin captive breeding of some species to prevent

their extinction. Barriers exist even around ‘free’ animals. Their habitats have shrunk down so much that they cannot roam the world as we do. However, a national park or sanctuary at least affords them some space, whereas a cage is nothing but an instrument of torture. I dream of the day when all the world shall resolve that confining an animal within a cage is a sin and we shall see to it that there are no more cages. □

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