



Stairway to Heaven

The building in which I live is situated on quite a steep hillside, and because of this, when you stand out on the street and look at it, what you think are the first and second stories, are actually the third and fourth. The entranceway - which most of us usually think of as being on the ground floor - comes in on the third level of the building. Below this are two levels that are hidden from view from the street.

As a result of this hillside construction, there are a lot of stairs here. From the entranceway, stairs run up to the top floor as well as down into the lower levels. But to get to the very lowest level, there are no stairs inside the building. The workshop where I do most of my daily work is located on this lowest floor of the building, and to reach it, I must go outside and use a separate metal staircase to go up and down.

As I have mentioned before, there is a river running along just behind the building, and because of this there is quite a lot of 'wildlife' in the neighbourhood. The river provides a feeding ground, a playground, and a travel route for quite a number of different animals. For some of these creatures, my outdoor staircase seems to be a useful way to get down into the river valley, so I frequently meet 'visitors' when I myself am going up or down.

Perhaps the most common animal I see on the stairs - at least in summer - are small snakes. I say 'small', but actually they are not always so little. Just this morning (the incident that prompted this story) I met one who was well over a meter in length. These snakes usually slither away as soon as they feel my footsteps coming near, and I don't get much chance to inspect them closely, but this one was in no hurry, and I was able to come right up to him, where I could see his tiny tongue flickering in and out.

Another very common creature here are crabs. The river has no fish to speak of, but it is full of little crabs, and for some reason that I don't understand, they are constantly climbing my stairs! Occasionally, one of them even climbs all the way up and comes into the building itself. What an incredibly long and hard journey for a tiny little crab - it must be like climbing Mt. Everest!

Once - and only once - I met a monkey on the stairs, but the neighbourhood people tell me that monkeys are almost never seen around here, so I think he must have been lost and trying to find a way back to his home in the mountains.

Because I use the stairs so much, my feet have learned how to navigate by themselves, and when I go up and down in the late evening, or at night, I have no need to use a light. But this does sometimes have negative consequences. We have had a lot of rain recently, and as I made my way down the stairs in the pitch darkness the other night, I felt something quite hard underneath my sandal, and heard a simultaneous crunching sound.

When I stopped to investigate, I discovered that I had crushed quite a large snail that had been laboriously making his way up the long flight of stairs. Ah well, such things can't be helped ... But for him, it was truly a 'Stairway to Heaven' that night!

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