

## Jhunmun and the Horrible Spider by Ajay Pratap

In a far away forested village there lived a very small boy called Jhunmun Phadnavees. He was a Sholiga tribal by caste. Thus in the manner of all Sholiga boys he grew-up with a perfect understanding of the way trees, plants, animals, easterly and westerly winds, rain spring and pond-water and everything animate and inanimate which exists in nature behave. Just when he was turning six, a great curiosity got hold of him as in the manner of all curiosities, which seize all six-year old boys all over this wide world. And this was on account of the fact that he asked himself the quintessential question – what does scare me?

By the grand old age of six Jhunmun Phadnavees had heard enough grandmothers' and grandfathers' tales that he should choose from them what he should be scared of. As in the manner of all grandparents all over the world his own had told him to be scared of almost everything so he would stay home with them cuddle-up with them especially on cold winter nights. That certainly did not satisfy Jhunmun as he had now turned six and he was set to discover the world for himself.

And so it was that one fine morning Jhunmun took his slingshot and having filled his pockets with clay pellets with which to shoot the slingshot he slunk-away into the forest without telling anyone. He had to face the dangers by himself, or so he thought that a man's inner strength is tested against the worst of monsters and beasts with which the local Kurinchi forests were said to be filled.

The first hour or so of his walk into the forest of Kurinchi were over known walkways from which he had often collected fruits, vegetables, flowers, honey, and fire-wood, and was thus rather old hat. He had to go farther, where the elephants roam during the day. He had spent many a night cringing in their very low-slung huts in their village Kiddinadu, which had by the wisdom of the ages been built low, so as to escape the marauding elephants notice during the nights when they entered their village to have a go at the Banana trees and the Jack.

He knew this neck of the woods very well however the forests extended way beyond the area his village inhabited and its people roamed to fulfill their daily needs. He needed to go much farther into the forests, beyond the point any man or boy had gone before. It would take that much going to find the place where the elephants roam and many other surprises await to test his fear-worthiness.

So Jhunmun sallied forth regardless of the unknown through horrible forests and vines, scratchy leaves, and jungle-bugs, hissing streams and the fear of thugs. Soon a very famous wild buffalo called Bukbuk emerged from the bushes and stood right in the middle of his track and accosted him with these questions – Jhunmun what are you doing so alone and so far into the forest? Do you not know what your grandparents shall

say if they learn that you have ventured to come so far into the forest where wild beasts roam all alone?

Jhunmun was in no mood for such questions from the mere jungle Buffalo for he respected only the elephants. So he fired back, "Listen Bukbuk, it is so nice that you are here. Why don't you give me a ride further into the jungle and I shall explain along the way, why I had to come so far. Bukbuk, seeing his resolve, agrees, and Jhunmun quickly leaps onto his broad and mighty shoulders and is soon nestled comfortably with his legs dangling on either side of Bukbuk.

Bukbuk then started to move with a very royal gait and had his ears propped up all curious to hear Jhunmun's explanation as to the purpose for his historic journey.

Then as they were some miles into the forest and Jhunmun had slept a little along the way he suddenly spoke, "You see Dear Bukbuk there comes a time in a forest man's life when he wants to learn how and why he is different from other animals that he has hunted and eaten traditionally. For surely just as the tiger and the leopard eat us with relish and snakes and other creatures kill us readily we in turn also have a capacity to kill your brethren. However I feel there must be a reason for all this. Is it necessary for us to kill each other in order to survive or are there other ways and means of living? This, my grandparents haven't been able to explain and this is the reason for this journey. Is that enough of an answer?"

"For you yes, Dear Jhunmun." spoke Bukbuk absentmindedly, as his thoughts were elsewhere, and in the middle of all the trampling through bushes and swamps of the Kurinchi forests.

And then he spoke again with greater attention to the question posed by Jhunmun.

"Listen here, Friend. I eat grass and leaves, fruits and fiber, and have thus far only chewed the cud during this journey. We have passed many a peril like small carnivores like jackals and wolves that are but sacred of my hoof beats alone. An elephant is kindred to me because he too is a vegetarian but would readily trouble and even kill me if he perceives me as a threat to his fodder.

On many occasions, I have had to ram some very perky elephants only to chase them away. One man's ceiling is another man's floor!

At my ripe age of twenty or so years, I give two hoots which mammal is threatened by my presence and which not. Not that it matters that you are animal of sort too.

Finally, I should say that there is also a civil code for us to follow, that no animal in their senses, may go around all day like a cry-baby whining Oh! He, He, and he too, threatened me!"

As the two good old friends travel and exchange stories about the nature and nurture of mammalian life they soon near a waterfall of immense propensities. The thunderous cascade may be heard from many miles distant and Bukbuk and Jhunmun both sigh, stretch their limbs, and lick their lips, at the thought of some rightfully deserved rest by

the side of the waterfall and some cool sweet water to drink. A swift and cool breeze greeted them. And then looking at the spot by the waterfall which both the friends had selected for some forty-winks and a drink of water Bukbuk said, “Okay, kid. Since we have come thus far I may as well tell you that you are indeed not the first of the many tribes in this region to have come over to this spot for as long as my ancestry goes which is the same age as your ancestry upon this planet. Our respective ancestors were all visitors to this spot for one thing or another.” “And what would that be, Dear Bukbuk? What purpose brought our respective ancestors thus far into the forest at this desolate looking spot? I suppose to lie down like us and to drink the sweet and cold water?”

“Precisely. And more.” said Bukbuk.

“What else, tell me?”

“Ah, well. That’s a long story. Once upon a time there lived many buffaloes who roamed this land fearlessly. There were men too, and women and children, who all lived at this place here....”

“And then?”

Bukbuk, “And then what? We got so used to see each other, and as we gradually discovered that your kind could also live on vegetarian-food, a process which took several thousands of years, and then we became so friendly!”

“Is that all?”

Bukbuk, “Basically, yes...yet there were a few twists and turns.”

“Really, that is interesting. Do go on.”

Bukbuk, “You see Jhunmun, we are both basically animals, aren’t we?”

Jhunmun, “Animals? Perhaps, yes...but only in a manner of speaking.”

Bukbuk, “In a manner of speaking? How do you mean?”

Jhunmun, “See. Dear Old Bukbuk. I can talk, whereas you can’t can you?”

Bukbuk, “Yes. And I can chew grass whereas you can’t can you? That sort of argument can go on and on dear Jhunmun and that wouldn’t lead us anywhere in particular. Let’s try a different sort of syllogism....”

Jhunmun, “Ayen?”

Bukbuk, “Oh, argument, silly boy. A syllogism is an argument which explains something.”

Jhunmun, “You mean talk about something else?”

Bukbuk, “No. No. Let’s talk about the same thing in a different sort of way.”

Jhunmun, “Talk about the same thing in a different sort of way. Now let me see. Hmmmm. Can you say that again?”

Bukbuk, “Yes. My pleasure. Let’s talk about the same thing in a different sort of way!”

Jhunmun, “Oh. Yes. Absolutely. Got it, dear old Bukbuk. You are intelligent.”

Bukbuk, “This is just the beginning. You haven’t yet asked me how your species and ours became friends at all?”

Jhunmun, “Yes, pray tell me?”

Bukbuk, “Well. We were obviously watching your species go from being pure meat-eaters, toward, vegetarian foods.”

Jhunmun, “What do you mean you watched our species? Huh?”

Bukbuk, “Well, dear, Boy! I mean exactly what I said, didn’t I?”

Jhunmun, “How can your species, the pure animals, watch us? Huh?”

Bukbuk, ” Dear, child. Don’t mix metaphors. Ever ask the Hah...Tiger that question? Hee Hee Heh, Heehe Heheheh. Oooooooooooooooooonh.”, bellowed Bukbuk, in a typical Bubalus bubalis fashion, as he was nearly past mirth, with this question of Jhunmun Phadnavees.

It had heaved-up his blood having conjured in his mind the bedeviled meat-eating, predator, the Tiger.

He thought aloud, we eat grass, but no one has yet said that grass has life. It is inert, meant only for us to feed-off and dung; dung which regenerates more grass; there you have it; we are perpetually the greatest of living peaceful creatures.

But not the tiger, he doesn't eat grass!

He scraped his hooves...and uttered a feeble, “No, No.”

Jhunmun, “My Word, Dear Old Bukbuk. What indeed did I say that you should say such complicated things and laugh too all of which is within your cognitive reckoning and not least mine?”

Bukbuk, “Dear Child. Consider that the un-manly predators, like the tigers, and occasionally, the leopards, and lo and behold, even the wolves, and, wild dogs, have been hunting our types for a few centuries now. Do you not consider that we would have watched these species for the sake of our survival?”

Jhunmun, “Yes. Yes. Most certainly.”

Bukbuk, “Then, in that case, if the Homo sapien, who is just another animal, were also hunting us, for centuries, then do you or don’t you think, that we would have watched him alike? Han?”

Jhunmun, “You get 10/10, for that one.....as the Masters at our Primary School say. You make perfect sense.”

Bukbuk, “Oooooooooooooooooooooooooon? Do I?”

Jhunmun, “Yes, Dear Bukbuk. But I must here remark that even in my six long years of life whenever I saw one of your kind eyeing one of ours I always thought that you were looking at us rather than, as you say, watching us.”

Bukbuk, “Yes, you would have thought that because it is only the Homo sapiens who have something called the EGO! And, then, satisfied as I am with your compliment to a mere animal and then in that case we are ready for the further journey. So Upsy Daisy! Old Fellow.”

Then, and then again, the Bukbuk and the Jhunmun Phadnavees astride Bukbuk, trample, and crash through, bushes of all kinds until the both of them are wondering what these so called primitive folkloric human-animal or animal-human interfaced journeys are all about. And then quite the unlikeliest of things happened which is that the Bukbuk stumbled and fell face-first into a hole in the ground taking Jhunmun with him all the way down to about sixty feet below the Earth where they presently thudded very painfully into a lot of water.

Jhunmun, “Help. Help. Help. Somebody save me. Help...” as a lot of fresh-water filled his mouth, lungs and nostrils. Even before he knew it the enormous flank of Bukbuk grazed his side, a signal for him to cling on to his sizable horns which Jhunmun did at once, and Bukbuk swam flat-out until he had reached the very rocky sides of this underground cavern through which this subterranean river called Ghorpuri washed the underworld. The utterly terrified Jhunmun was new to this spot, but Ho Ho...Bukbuk was not! At once Jhunmun set about drying his clothes just as soon he had had the time to catch his breath. Then all at once he breaks out in a song:

Bongo Mile Bongo,  
Bonge Ke Jute Maisur,  
Maisur La Marigwana,  
Teri Guji Ka La  
Pari Bomma...

Even as this infant’s voice ricocheted off the enormous and very savagely uneven walls of this ghostly cavern. Of course, the very purpose of Jhunmun’s song was to fend-off the unnamed fears which besotted him in this unearthly place. No Sun, No Moon, No stars, No Nothing. Just the vast sea of roaring waters, eddying, churning, foaming, and seemingly cascading to the right of him. Streaks of blue daylight pinged-off the waters’ surface.

Bukbuk, ” Hoooonh. Hooonh. Hold it there Boy!”

Jhunmun, “Hold it? How do you mean hold it, Dear Bukbuk?”

Bukbuk, “Ooof! No. No. What I mean is that if you shut down your vocal then I shall have a chance here to explain to you what this place is and why have I brought you here!”

Jhunmun, “Ho. Ho. Yes, dear Bukbuk, I see. I see.”

Bukbuk, “Ooof. There you go again. How alien, I should say entirely alien...the idea that a human can see in the dark. Dear Child...shall I just say that you keep quiet for awhile?”

Jhunmun, “Hmmm.”

Bukbuk, “Now silly boy. not even that silly and slimy Hmmm...that puts me off even worse than your talking. You little boys have such a nasty knack for putting elders off. When I say quiet, silence or something of the kind I really mean that I wouldn't even like to hear a pin-drop from you. Got it?”

At last Bukbuk's roar has the desired effect. There is pin-drop-silence. he falls asleep very quickly.

The subterranean Ghorpuri River's waters symbiotically and quite magically roll on as if singing a lullaby. Very slowly Jhunmun leans against Bukbuk and deliriously and very fitfully also falls asleep.

A hour or so later, Bukbuk, the Bubalus bubalis, is awakened by instinct, and as he negotiates his bulk to take a dekho around, he ends-up, waking the little Jhunmun Phadnavees too.

Wading through the shallow incline of the submerged rocky shelf on which they were resting they saw an enormous white elephant.

He nudged a little boy into complete wakefulness. And then, he greeted the White Elephant called Airavat, thus:

Bukbuk, “Dear Airavat Bhai. Thy gait is most wonderful. Thy pale skin most luminous and shiny. Thy presence, most wonderful and welcome.”

Airavat, “Yeah, Mate. You think that it is all so cool. How convenient for a bovid and a Homo Sapien to make that assumption. Yet this dark-dome is most depressing for an elephant like me. And there are not, Dear Bukbuk, as you very-well know, not very many white elephants like me in this world.”

Bukbuk, “Man. You're really bad-out and methinks you are badly in need of some good cough syrup, mate. Look at you. You're an Elephant man, the king of kings. Yet, you have a nose-run worse than a mouse. It is some long twenty-years, since when we have known each other. You have yourself and quite willfully chosen to inhabit this godforsaken subterranean cavern, where there is no sunlight and do not, please, please tell me, that that is the reason why you are white; and now, that you seemingly suffer a perpetual cough and cold you complain! Vallah!”

Jhunmun, “What? What?”

Airavat, “Man! that was quite a diatribe. And, me. I've been doing some arithmetic down here. Ha. Growth. Price. Finance. Or do we here need bigger explanations?”

Jhunmun, “Yeah, yeah. I would indeed like to hear about Growth. Price. Finance. I mean your thoughts on these issues are central to animal and human lives, Dear Airavat. Do go on. I am all ears.”

Bukbuk, “OK. OK. Airavat Bhai. You may as well tell this kid what we have been secretly meeting here to discuss for some twenty years, never mind your white skin and mine black...”

And then Airavat, the only white elephant in the world, rested himself, slowly and steadily, so that neither Bukbuk, nor, the little Jhunmun, by accident got crushed under his enormous bulk. And when he was thus settled on this ledge above the dark waters of the mysterious river Ghorpuri, he began to clear his sizable throat for a speech-act. The thunderous noises he emitted clanged, banged and thus ricocheted of the enormous and very dark walls of the cavern until both Jhunmun and Bukbuk were both practically deaf.

Airavat,”Growth, price, finance. Three sisters. A lot of patience is here required. but they are all very affable and mix with each other a lot. just like the leaves of various trees when blown away in the wind and piled up on the floor of a forest. very difficult to tell one from the other. but presently we shall get to discovering by experiment that all leaves of all trees save a few taste bitter to varying degrees...and they thought that the one and only...living white elephant...in this world, is having fun, chewing these leaves. Heh. Heh. Heh!!!”

Now an Elephant’s Heh, Heh, Heh, in terms of its decibels goes a very long way further to similar phonemes emitted by sapiens or bubaluses, and hence, Jhunmun and Bukbuk are again obliged to use their fore-paws, hands or as the case maybe, clamped tight over their ears, to shut out this very high-pitched and high velocity sound which multiplied, on impact, as it ricocheted, off the walls of this deep and dark cavern, where this very mysterious subterranean river Ghorpuri runs. And then, he cleared his throat.

“Lo and behold. Ze miracles of de nature. Modern man tends to think dat he him have all de sholusaans to dees whole probleme of dees universe. Yet, his money dem faast ruunin owt. why is dees? Aaiyee do beg u de ansaar. If u hab any, that is...?”

Jhunmun, “Naaiye, naaiye, Airavat Ji. Beg, please explain.”

Bukbuk, “Ho. Ho. Hooooooooooooooooo.”

Airavat casts a jaundiced eye at his old mate Bukbuk and then raises his eyebrow and looks Jhunmun squarely in the eye, in a manner of askance, as the very whitest, but really, the only very one elephant, in the single whole world, is wont to do.

Jhunmun, “Naaiye, Naaiye, Airavat Ji. Beg, please explain.”

Airavat, “Dem money. My dear child is like so many leaves of da forest. Aas laang aas it is fresh we may eat ‘em, no sooner are dey dry daat they are of no use whaatsoever. Dem money is like daat. Immediate use-value or Nothin. Animals eat what dey get and when dey get, dey do naat speculate. It is only modern man which gaat dis sensibility to

speculate and which is da reason why dem all be runnin owt of de money. There is enough fawr everyone's need but not for dere greed."

Jhunmun, "Aiyaaaan? Dear Bukbuk Ji. What is this strange talk all about. Where on this Earth are we?"

Airavat, "Zapota."

Bukbuk, "Zapota"

Jhunmun, "Zapota? Where is that?"

Airavat, "Zapota. Zapota. Ha. ha. ha. This deer yung maan is quite altogether another werld full of de very big and da very evil spidaars, which eat de maan an de animaal alike. Kruel. Beyaand aal imagination. Ha! Mine. De Mine Gaad Help aas. Welcome yung maan to Dis wonderland of da Zapota. where life an death are aal alike. Where a boy become de maan in a zilch. Here lies, deer boay de test of yaar manhood. prepare. hah. hah. ha"

And the very suddenly Toba Ash rained down and a wholesome tsunami swept this underground wonderland, a hailstorm broke-out, and then a whirlwind swept by, a tornado engulfed this portal down so beneath dees earth. Aal hell broke loose. Slowly and very steadily den dis earth re-arranged itself into da Gondwanaland with de Tethyse aal arownd. Mayhem. Miracle. da magic of de underworld.

And even as Airavat and Bukbuk braced themselves, like so many times before when this had happened and of which event their memory was so clear, Jhunmun overawed was already very fast asleep.

Then Bukbuk and Airavat, are at long last absolutely free, to confabulate about this world's happenings, between them.

Airavat, "How are things in the upWorld?"

Bukbuk, "Just the same as in the downWorld!"

Airavat, "Exactly?"

Bukbuk, "Exactly."

Airavat, "I have heard strange tell from down here."

Bukbuk, "And I have done the same from up there."

Airavat, "Exactly?"

Bukbuk, "Exactly."

Airavat, "Good. Then we may talk."

Bukbuk, "Yeah, Airavat, but what about? Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?"

Airavat, "The spider Houdini of course. That's the worst sort of...umm Animal."



Bukbuk, “Not that man-eating witch! You call her an animal, mate? Is that a joke, or what?”

Airavat, “Yes, Brother Bukbuk. These are very very bad times. Animaal do naat de recognise de daat animaal, very very baad deese times.”

Bukbuk, “What? Is she on the roll again? Chewing-up people?”

Airavat, “Worse. Chewing animals too. And that is the point.”

Bukbuk, “Golly.”

Airavat, “No. That sort of swearing does not solve this problem. You know that sort of species. These eight-legged ones. She is now asking for a kill every day of the week.”

Bukbuk, “What? Mumbling Maloogas!”

Airavat, “yes. yes. Mumbling Malubas indeed!”

All so very suddenly then a banshee wail of the vilest kind engulfed this underground canyon. Followed by what seemed like a blast of horribly putrefying and fetid smell. That sound and ugly smell startled young Jhunmun Phadnavees to full wakefulness.

Jhunmun, “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.”

Bukbuk, “Shut your little mouth. You silly boy. You shall have us all eaten.”

Airavat, “And you are actually shouting louder than him!”

Jhunmun fell silent hearing his elders speak aloud thus which clearly revealed their own sense of alarm, which he was very quick to surmise, was due to some clear and present danger. Presently, his own adrenalin began to flow rapidly as he remembered in an instant his grandfather’s tale about how human life was always full of dangers which they must always strive to guard ourselves against. Thus, and sensing this danger, he rapidly took shelter behind a very large boulder.

Watching Jhunmun take cover behind the boulder Airavat looked toward Bukbuk.

Airavat, “Bukbuk Bhai. Shall we adopt the earlier strategy of evading her?”

Bukbuk, “Not so, Dear Friend.”

Airavat, “And why do you say ‘not so’ Dear Friend?”

Bukbuk, “Because Dear Friend we have with us a two-legged species, or did you not notice?”

Airavat, “Yes. That is so?”

Bukbuk, “Well?”

Airavat, “Well...? You are not thinking of pitting this Mowgli against Houdini, of who even such large creatures as you and I are scared?”

Bukbuk, “It is elementary Dear Airavat. He has a cranial capacity of 1600 centimeter cube. Whereas large as we are, the two of us, relative to our body-weights, we have but ant-sized brains, compared to him?”

“Do you mean he is a better hunter than us?”

“Chewing leaves Dear Airavat Ji is called grazing, and not hunting, as a matter of fact.”

“Ok. Then you are on.”

“No. Ok. He is on.”

And then very suddenly as Houdini’s growls of anger grown from acute hunger were closing in, Airavat and Bukbuk dragged Jhunmun Phadnavees to his feet, and shook him to full wakefulness.

Airavat, “Get-up, you silly boy. There is work for you to do.”

Bukbuk, “Get-up Jhunmun. There is something you must do.”

Jhunmun, “Ayen?”

Airavat, “Get-up. I said. You have to kill a Spider.”

Bukbuk, “Ahem. Ahem. Well, frankly speaking, it is larger than Airavat, actually! Heh...heh...!”

Jhunmun, “You are talking to me? Are you talking to me?”

Airavat, “Don’t waste time with silly questions such as these, you two-legged creature. Tell us how you are going to hunt-down this savage beast.”

Bukbuk, “Yes. Jhunmun. It was no accident that I brought you here. This here is the place and this here is the monster which has threatened us animals for a very long-time. So when i saw you lost in the forest the idea did occur to me that wise as your species is, perhaps, even a youngster like you could perhaps solve this long outstanding problem of ours. So do go on and tell us how you would hunt Houdini the evil spider for us?”

Jhunmun, "Okay. Let us give the matter some thought. Have we got some time?"

Airavat, “No.”

Bukbuk, “No.”

Jhunmun, “No? Well, then just get eaten-up! You want me to play ball. Then do it my way. Got it?”

Airavat, “Got it.”

Bukbuk, “Got it.”

Jhunmun, "Okay troops. Here is the plan! Come and sit behind this boulder with me and let us discuss it. If we speak loudly, just as you both have been until now, why the game shall be up sooner that you could say Jack Robinson.”

Airavat, “Who is Da Jack Robinson?”

Bukbuk, “Yeah. yeah.”

Jhunmun, “Cut it out, you two, will you? That is just a linguistic turn and you are in fact not supposed to understand it at all. Got it? Now pay attention. My ancestors have all been hunters and we hunt only to eat, we do not kill for vengeance. The two of you are so scared of being eaten and bemoan this outcome as if Houdini would be morally wrong if she were to eat-up the both of you, even if it for her to fill her hungry stomach. It is this irrational chaine’ de operatoire which is the cause of the fear the two of you experience at this moment. It’s the food-chain silly.”

Airavat, “The food-chain, Ha.Ha.Ha.”

Bukbuk, “Heh. Heh. The food-chain. Ha.Ha.Ha.Ha.Ha.”

Jhunmun, “Good to see the two of you get over your fears even for a moment. Now. The fact of the matter is that since I have the two of you domesticated, in a manner of speaking, indicates that we must be well into the Neolithic Age. Right?”

Airavat, “Right. Right.”

Bukbuk, “Quite right. Quite right.”

Jhunmun, “Since the both of you have agreed, we shall see if there is an option to killing Houdini out-right. Comprendre?”

Airavat, “Si Senior.”

Bukbuk, “Si Senior.”

Jhunmun, “Why on earth are the two of you speaking Spanish? Here we are all, according to the two of you, purportedly about to get eaten to death, although I have challenged very distinctly the possibility of that premise as a being the only correct one beyond all other realms of possibilities, and indeed I am right here by your side trying to prepare you both for a counter-maneuver, for which I must elicit from you both some further information about Houdini’s habits and behaviour, and all of a sudden the two of you break-out into mellifluous Spanish as if we are all headed for the Sunday Sermon and Apple-Pie after that?”

There was time for nothing else after that as with a very loud crash a nearby wall of the cavern collapsed completely boulders scattering hither and thither and an enormous leg of a spidery-kind magnified a million times so that it was looking like death incarnate thrust some small remaining boulders out of its way and was then in full-view.

“Run”, shouted Jhunmun.

“What”, said Airavat and Bukbuk.

“Man. I said run. Run like the blazes.”

“But you said that we were going to kill this thing.” said Airawat.

“And that that is why you had to elicit some more information from us about her behaviour.” said Bukbuk.

“Yes. Those who run live to fight another day. And I have already seen that bit of her behaviour which I thought that I would question you about. Can or can not she break stones? So where do we go from here?”

Airavat and Bukbuk quickly and in a low voice confer and advise Jhunmun, “Why. Haven’t you heard the song...under the water silly...run for it...let’s all dive into the Ghorpuri River. Houdini with her bulk cannot swim. We shall cross-over to the other side in a jiffy!”

That indeed they all do and are safe for the moment.

Meanwhile, Houdini, in hot pursuit of her day’s prey, has carved a hole in the cave walls large enough for her entire bulk to squeeze through. She does this and then lumbers up to the nearer side of the Ghorpuri River. Here she stands absolutely still eyeing her quarry across the river.

Airavat, first to notice an anomaly threatening their combined survival, is quick to alert his team.

“Hey. Have you all noticed her feet. I mean, the span of her strides. She would be across this river in but a single step.”

And then again opined Airavat as the tallest of the prey, “And, Dear Friends. Frankly, I do not think we really have the sort of time to reckon will she, won’t she, etc. etc. etc. Just get-up and take a dive into the waters of this river and let’s lie low until she retreats or completely loses interest in us.”

Bukbuk, “Yaar Airavat. What a wonder of an idea.”

Jhunmun, “Ayen?”

Then the threesome take a quick dive into the river and swim down its very bottom. But to their great surprise, and they should have been wiser in such a regard, for before jumping into the river, the threesome quite forgot, that spiders, all spiders of every hue and ilk, are indeed very good divers and swimmers.

Yet when this spider, that is, Houdini the very large spider which lived in this subterranean climes, jumped-in into the Ghorpuri River, chasing her meaty quarries, given her sheer bulk and size, the splash consequent to her jump into the river nearly and almost emptied it, leaving Airavat, Bukbuk and little Jhunmun, very very wet and extremely exposed.

And this is when, instead of pouncing upon them, as she very well could have and making a very nice meal of them in a matter of seconds, the spider Houdini began to speak.

“O you residents of the forest Kurinchi and the village Kiddinadu...Hear me speak...and hear me well...As a matter of fact; I am not hungry at all, today. So your lives have been spared provided you get out of my subterranean abode quickly. And, that goes for you too, Airavat. However, I shall presently leave you with these words...Appearances can be deceptive, for I am no ordinary spider, that only makes meals out of whichever living thing passes this way...Indeed I am an old spirit of the Kurinchi Forest, living here to save it from the depredation of humans and animals...only those who have my express permission may enter here...And, surprise, surprise...this is not all I have to say...stay awhile longer and let me finish.

Now, then. When you go back to your respective abodes, you animals to the forest Kurinchi, and you young man to your village, tell your animals and people that Houdini is a goddess and most of the time she is not in her living form. I live as a painting on rocks and mountains high and deep within forests. I come to life, jumping out of my painted form on rocks and mountains only when I perceive that there is a potential threat to this forest.

From now onward, let this become common knowledge and which is why I have spared your lives.

Now go.”

Airavat who had been living within the stronghold of Houdini hidden from her detection for a few weeks now was quick to suggest that the easiest way-out was to float down the Ghorpuri River and emerge where it would. Jhunmun and Bukbuk were in no mood at all, scared as they were, to argue with him. Thus all of them jumped in quickly into the river.

Soon they were washed down in a tumult of hands and legs down the deep and dark cavern then out in the open but then only for a flash of a second and then suddenly the huge and a greatly roaring torrent of the waterfall was upon them. Down they went the short but brutal cascade which whipped their bodies this way and that, until they were in calmer waters several miles downstream from this cascade.

Thereafter, scared as they all were, each of them did exactly as was the Spider-Goddess Houdini’s bidding. It is thus that whenever a human or animal ever sees a painting on the rocks, he is quick to move on from the spot, for fear of what spirits of the forests may come alive from these figures, and harm them.

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