

## The Boy and the Cat

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I sat at the edge of the pit and dipped my toes in the murky water. It rippled, and I tilted my head to the side to ponder its movement.

Maya stretched her long body forward until her nose just barely tapped the surface. The ripples she made were smaller but it was a reaction nonetheless. In that moment, I decided that water was different than people; I could count on the response of the water to remain relatively consistent. In my past experience, humans weren't like that. My sister once inexplicably jumped in a pond the same mucky color, causing my mother to shriek and yank her out. She ended up covered in mud anyway. But that was years ago.

I ruffled Maya's fur, its natural snowy color concealed by all the dirt and grime. I briefly entertained the idea of plopping her into the pool entirely, but thought better of it. She was my sole companion, so I wanted her on my good side. As she purred in assurance, a fly buzzed around her, landing on a particularly dark spot of her coat. I scrunched up my face and flicked it away.

"When's the last time you were washed?" We'd been on the run for weeks now, and I couldn't even remember the last time I had truly bathed.

I leaned forward and cupped some water in my hands. I rubbed it around my face and smoothed it especially into that nook between my inner cheek and the rim of my nose, nearly getting it in my mouth. Perhaps it wouldn't taste as bad as it looked, but I didn't let it tempt me.

Despite the muck of the pond, my face felt fresher as I lathered it with the slimy, silky liquid. Sure the pond could have been a bit more pristine itself, but it did the job of getting the dirt off my face and for that I was satisfied. I imagined the surface of the water rising higher around me until it was level with my belly button. And then a bit higher. I could nearly feel its form hugging my body, soaking into my parched skin.

Screw it. I took off my shirt, unzipped my damp khaki shorts, and plunged into the pond with a splash that made Maya recoil. My hair slapped my back as I swung my head up and rubbed my eyes, watching as Maya became less blurry.

Determined to share the exhilaration, I decided a bath would be good for. I picked her up positioned her over the water, "You're up."