

One Day

It's been a cold night. I can't control the shivering that wracks my body. My bones ache as I pull myself from the hollow that's been home for the last few months.

I stretch, first one way, then the other, easing cramped muscles. I need to move. It's time to leave.

The air is still. Each breath produces a small misty cloud. The sky lightens as the sun peaks above the horizon, throwing warming shards of light across the dew-wet grass.

Over the months, I've come to know where I can find help, a few morsels of bread that will keep me going until I discover something more substantial.

But first, I must drink. I walk to the edge of the small river nearby and bend my head towards the foul-smelling water. A few sips are all I can stomach, but I know it will suffice until I can find better.

The sun brings warmth to my body as I wander across the playing field where, if luck is with me, people have left unwanted bread and chicken bones after their Sunday barbeques the day before.

I rummage through plastic bags that litter the grass and chew on the tiny morsels find; the food in my belly is a welcome relief to the hunger that always plagues me.

My daily route takes me first to a small bakery a block away. The smell of freshly baked bread is in the air as I approach the owner; she smiles and passes over a bread roll. I quickly snatch it from her hand in case she changes her mind. A few paces from the store, I stop and eat, always alert to danger, the possibility of losing my precious meal.

The pavements are busy as I weave toward the market through a sea of legs, trolleys, and baskets. I have to be on my guard, for while many are kind, some would rather kick out at me than pat me.

Crossing the busy city roads is dangerous. I've learned to follow, never to attempt the crossing alone. I've seen others of my kind killed by cars, their bodies tossed unlovingly into a rubbish bag or thrown heartlessly into the river.

Once in the market, I snake through the stalls, picking up scraps of food or waiting patiently for a stall holder to throw me a morsel of meat.

But I'm not the only one searching for food. Growls and yells send me scurrying away when I walk into an area already guarded by others.

Today I'm lucky. By midday, my stomach is full. I find a quiet spot in the sunshine and lay down, my back to the wall, tired from the exertion of hunting for food.

The warmth of the sunshine and a full belly has me asleep in seconds, but I'm always vigilant. Any sound nearby, and I'm instantly alert. As the market stallholders pack up, I know it's time for me to leave too.

I return to the busy street and walk with others across to a concrete platform at its center. A train approaches. People exit while others board before it moves off and disappears into the distance.

What is this strange transport? I wonder. When the next train stops, I walk alongside an elderly woman with a large shopping bag. My heart beats rapidly as the door closes. I stand next to the door, ready to make my escape. No one says anything. Some nudge one another and smile; others ignore me. Two stops later, familiar smells greet me as the doors slide open. I know where I am. I'm back at the park.

The day is growing old as I exit the train. I decide to wait for a while on the grassy patch of land where my owner left me all those months ago. Perhaps they will return today and take me home, or maybe I'll find another family who will love me.

It's colder now. I've waited long enough; it's time to return to the safety of my shelter. I curl up beneath the sun-warmed rocks.

Maybe I'll ride the train again tomorrow.

Graciously written for FAAN by Author, Sandra Beaumont

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Incredible News! After months of fundraising and searching for land, **FAAN (Fundacion Familia Amor Animal)** entered into a contract last week to purchase permanent land in Tarqui, Cuenca for the building of the most modern dog shelter in Ecuador/South America. There are over 150 homeless, abandoned, or senior dogs in our care. We urgently need to raise \$10,000 to complete the property purchase, conduct a land survey, obtain permits, and begin construction.

Saturday, August 19th is International Homeless Animal Day.

Please donate whatever you can on this special day and we thank Sandi Beaumont for her story giving the homeless dogs of Cuenca a voice.

<https://www.faanecuador.org/donations.html>

