

A Day in the Life

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That morning Robert awakens with a jerk as a droplet of water hits his lower back. Though he probably did not get more than two hours' sleep, he does not feel tired. As he casts a glance at Rita, who is fast asleep, he cannot help but feel quite guilty considering the previous day's events.

Since the little ones had left the nest a long time ago to form their own separate families, it was now entirely up to him to bring food to the table. (And that is what he had done, in a way.) He had picked up their meal from a place which even he had considered to be rather dubious. Nevertheless, food it was. He and Rita picked at their meal silently, aware of its unappealing taste, but choosing not to discuss the topic and look at the bright side instead – at least they had something to eat. However, some time later, as Robert was about to fall asleep, he distantly heard the unmistakable noises of Rita retching distantly and felt a great wave of regret swept over him.

Today, he decides, he is going to make up for it and bring her some food from one of the best restaurants in the city, regardless of the cost.

He leaves the place, thinking about the fastest way to arrive at the desired destination. Although travelling underground is both the easiest and safest way to get where he wants to go, he is not particularly fond of doing it. Reluctantly, he plods towards the nearest descent and scurries his way down.

When he reaches solid ground, he remains in his place for a moment and looks around him. There is not a single aspect that he approves of down here. He despises the horrid smell, hates the dampness and the heat, and absolutely *loathes* how crowded this place is, regardless of the time of day.

Robert is forced back to reality when the feel of getting bumped into becomes beyond unbearable. Right. The food.

Halfway to his intended location, Robert is once again assaulted by the memories of Rita's heaving and that horrid stench. Guilt is like a strangling hand, making it hard to breathe, and the mountain of bodies surrounding and pressing against him is only making matters worse.

Suddenly, he notices that someone is staring at him. When he realizes who it is, he freezes. Richard. He was looking quite larger – in height and width – than Robert, and they had had a rather unfriendly quarrel some time ago, which had left Robert on the floor, weak and partially covered in blood. Paralysed, Robert can feel the fear invade him, choking him. Aware of Richard's advantage both in health and strength, Robert knows that the safest bet is to go up to the surface. Hopefully, he will not be followed there.

Robert rushes as though his life depended on it – as it may be precisely the case – and after some blind running with the single purpose of escaping, he finds himself hurrying along the pavement. Although he is quite sure that Richard is nowhere in sight, he feels exposed by the sunlight. The harsh burning sensation on his back is not as comforting as he had expected, in spite

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of his preference for the warmer seasons. There are too many curious eyes for his liking at this time of day. He quickens his pace.

After a while, Robert is able to feel more relaxed. He takes a deep breath and enjoys the fresh pleasant caress of the morning wind. Slowly, his mind begins to drift away from the filthy streets and the towering buildings. Those who live in the countryside are the lucky ones, he ponders. Their life must be considerably better, away from the dirt and the noise and the crowds. Every day, he wishes he had been born somewhere outside the city or that he was still young enough to be able to escape from it, even if he had to do it alone. Despite never having personally been to the countryside – in fact, not once in his life has Robert been anywhere outside the city – he does know a few fortunate ones who have lived in that place (wherever it might be) and just by looking at them it is not difficult to realize that that lifestyle has got to be doubtlessly better. Even the way they move is different, as though they were simply strolling through life rather than constantly trying to *escape* from it.

Since the food for Rita is no longer a priority for Robert, he saunters along, immersed in his thoughts and completely unaware of the nasty glares people are throwing at him.

Robert is abruptly ripped away from his thoughts when a sudden high-pitched voice screams out: “Get that disgusting *thing* away from here!” Overwhelmed by shock and fear, he is barely able to evade the green glass bottle that someone is violently hurling at him. What he is not able to anticipate, though, is the swift kick from a young man which sends him flying across the street until colliding against a solid brick wall.

The usual standard for someone of his species is to quickly get up and rush towards the nearest sewer. Given his age, however, it is not surprising that he is not able to move for a while. Breathing is essentially a struggle now, and he is quite certain that there is blood emanating from somewhere in his body. He has been so careless, so naive, he reflects as he closes his eyes. He can hear the outraged voices around him and the purposeful steps getting closer and closer.

Using his last bit of energy, he picks himself up and scrambles away, following the familiar rotten smell of the sewers. He refuses to be killed, not today. Too many of his colleagues have died at the hands of those monsters, and Robert refuses to be just one more harmless rat that a human has managed to slaughter.