

**An Animal for a Day**  
by Ishika Muchhal

The piercing rays of sun filtered through my dream filled eyes which still resisted opening. The leaves crunched outside my den as the petite squirrels and rabbits scurried along on their daily routes. The wind carried the fragrances of newly blossomed flowers to me. Birds chirped high up on the branches inviting everyone to a new day. I thought I was dreaming so I opened my eyes only to behold the splendor of nature.

'Yes,' I thought to myself, 'it is finally spring.'

The long time of hibernation was finally over. Lifting my weary, black paws, I drowsily crawled out of my den. A flower from the young cherry blossom tree fell and landed lightly on my head. I reached up and grasped it between my claws and gazed at the miniscule dew drops on it. I looked up at the azure sky and saw a pack of geese fly south. The sun in the middle of the sky was partially covered by clouds on each side. A few puddles from the melted snow lay ahead of me.

All of a sudden, I felt my stomach grumble, a pang of hunger growing inside me. Gazing around at the vast forest ahead of me, I absorbed whatever I had left before I went into hibernation. Searching for food, I spotted some juicy, claret colored berries hanging from a bush that I had tried a few months ago. I decided to relish some of those and then go to the nearby lake for a drink of water. Those berries were delightfully scrumptious.

The water current was flowing steadily and some salmon, perch, and trout swam through the lake. I gazed into the water and saw my reflection in it. I took a large gulp of the sweet and fresh water. A refreshing feeling swept through every part of me. I took a leap into the lake and swam around for a while. I closed my eyes and started to float in the water. It was so peaceful with just the rhythmic splashing of fish swimming by.

It seemed as if years had passed by, but the peace was interrupted when a large bang sounded from deep in the woods, causing me to suddenly lurch forward and spray water in every direction. I hurriedly crawled out of the water, shaking my bedraggled and drenched fur, and went in the direction where the sound was coming from. From between the trees, I saw a black circular object pointing at the trees. Then I heard the bang again. A bird in flight dropped lifeless to the ground just a few feet away from another ill-fated bird. I realized it was what the human being weapon called a gun. Filled with terror, I desperately thought of what to do to escape. Realizing my fate would be the same as the dead bird if I did not get away fast, I thought to climb a tree but decided not to because the hunter was shooting up high. I traveled as fast as I could, listening to the resounding bangs of the gun. Then, right when I was outside of my den, a bullet came shooting towards me at high speed out of nowhere. I ducked just in time to save my life, but it still hit my paw. I groaned in pain and crawled clumsily into my den.

Sweat dripped from my fingers and forehead as I stared at the ceiling of my room. I was breathing at an abnormally rapid pace. Pictures of a vicious hunter blared in front of my eyes whenever I blinked.

'It is just a nightmare,' I thought to myself. I realized that that nightmare was a blessing in disguise. It made me realize how lucky I am to be alive.