

# ***In the Wilds of the City***

*Photo and essay by Michael E. Stanley*







I stand across the street from the elegant old edifice called Tokyo Station. With its red brick walls, granite window frames, and copper-sheathed roof, the building is a paradox: a symbol of a city but utterly unrepresentative of it. Dwarfed by the modern glass and concrete buildings of the nearby Marunouchi and Yaesu business districts, it seems to have been delivered here by mistake while en route to some European capital. That is the source of its charm.

The sun is now behind the Imperial Palace. Late afternoon has become early evening. The crowds grow denser; their pace quickens. The traffic is more hurried, more driven. The homeward rush has begun.

From a low bush alongside the sidewalk comes a slight sound and a tentative movement. I turn. My eyes search. A small feline face peers up at me through the rim of the foliage: it is one of the dozens of stray cats who find homes in and around the station. He—I am only assuming this common gender for the two of us—hesitates to show himself, but his wary, imploring eyes stay fastened to mine. He makes no sound. I unshoulder my camera bag and gently lower it to the sidewalk. Slowly opening it, I remove and unwrap the surviving half of my lunchtime sandwich. The cat does not flinch, but his golden eyes are now fixed on my hands and what they hold. I tear off a chunk of the sandwich and toss it in his direction. He watches it fall short, but drops low, and carefully sniffing, moves toward it. He crouches, and tests the offering with an extended paw. Then he is upon it, taking it in short sharp cat-

bites and occasionally glancing up, watching me watch him. A few meters away, cars tear the air as they hurtle past. He pays them no attention.

I offer another fragment of sandwich; it is greedily accepted. Yet another piece draws him a little farther out from his leafy cover, and one more has the same effect. A trust is forming. I tear off smaller pieces now and throw them so he must reach for them. By the time he has finished the last bit of sandwich, he is almost completely in the open. He looks up at me. I look at him. He is sure that I must have more sandwich somewhere. Waiting patiently, he watches the movements of my hands. Finally he gives up and looks away. He opens his mouth in a grimacing, fang-filled yawn.

I don't move. He stands up and walks to the concrete curb, and crouches down on it, only centimeters from the roadway. He looks at the passing cars, some of which have their lights on now.

With careful motions I lift a camera from my bag. I approach the cat slowly, until the front of my lens is just a whisker-length from his face. He gives me a long lonely look. His eyes show no pain or desperation, but just a penetrating sadness. Then he stands up and slips silently into the shrubbery from which he came. He melts into the leaves and shadow. The night is coming alive and his wild is calling him. ■

*Michael E. Stanley, born in California in 1947, studied cultural anthropology and archaeology, and is a photographer based in Japan since 1979.*