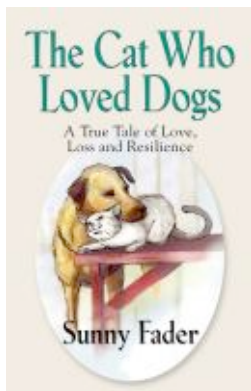


The Cat Who Loved Dogs

A True Tale of Love,
Loss and Resilience



Sunny Fader



The Cat Who Loved Dogs is a true story of love, loss and resilience. Hillary, a cunning Siamese mix kitten, joins the household of a writer and her two cats. It is not, however, until a dog joins the family that the cat is truly happy. When her dog suddenly disappears from her life, Hillary sets out to find a replacement... with unexpected consequences for the people whose lives she touches in the process.

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CHAPTER ONE

The last thing I needed was another cat. I already had two: Tiger, an orange tabby, who bore a closer resemblance to the cowardly lion in the Wizard of Oz than the graceful jungle denizen that had inspired his name, and a clever little beauty, Miss Elizabeth, a grey Abyssinian-mix. All I intended to do, when Leslie telephoned to tell me the kittens had arrived, was go next door to see them.

“I don’t know who’s more excited, Reisha or Piper,” Leslie announced as she let me in the front door. Reisha was Leslie’s seven-year-old daughter; Piper was her usually reticent German shepherd rescue. My money was on the dog. I had never seen Piper so animated. She sprinted spiritedly back and forth between us and the bedroom where Reisha was waiting with the new kittens. Apparently displeased with my pace,

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Piper suddenly swung around behind me and began goosing me down the hallway with a series of inelegant prods.

“Piper, stop that!” Leslie shrieked. Immediately, the dog’s tail sagged and she reverted to her usual submissive position at the heels of her mistress. “I just don’t know what’s gotten into her,” Leslie said. “The way she’s acting, you’d think she was the one who had the kittens.”

I expected Leslie, inveterate animal-lover that she is, to be thrilled with the new litter, but as she opened the bedroom door she seemed more resigned than joyful. When I saw the kittens I knew why. From their markings it was obvious they had been sired by a major source of frustration for my friend: the neighborhood’s feline Romeo—an over-sexed, unneutered Siamese. Leslie was convinced the cat, or more precisely its negligent owner, was responsible for our community’s burgeoning feral cat population. What she really resented most about the wandering Siamese, however, was the threat it posed to her beloved, but as yet un-spayed Sasha.

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There was a reason Leslie had not spayed her new kitten. She believes fervently that unless they are planning to breed their animals, it is the responsibility of all cat owners to spay or neuter their pets. However, Leslie also believes, (rightly or wrongly) that female cats thrive better if they are allowed to go through heat once before being spayed. She knew the risk she was taking and made every effort to keep Sasha indoors. But with a seven-year-old daughter and a rambunctious dog running in and out of the house, the odds of her preventing her cat from encountering the amorous Siamese were always slim at best.

I sympathized with Leslie's frustration, but looking down at the litter there was no doubt in my mind that Sasha's seduction had resulted in the cutest, most irresistible batch of kittens I had ever laid eyes on. My mistake was in picking one of them up. And that is how Hillary came into my life.

CHAPTER TWO

While I was holding the kitten, there was no doubt in my mind that she was meant to be a part of my pack, but once I got home I began having second thoughts. Did I really need the responsibility of another animal? I had just gotten my life back under control after my last pet fiasco. I have a tendency, when impulse prods me to do something I know full well is foolish or impractical, to—under the guise of being rational—weigh the pros and cons of the situation. “It’s not the same thing as last time,” I told myself. “We’re just talking about a kitten here, not another dog.”

It’s not that I have anything against dogs, mind you. I have one right now. However, at this particular time in my life having a dog just wasn’t practical—not for a freelance writer who spent a good deal of her time on the road. That’s what I tried to explain to my friend, Connie, that afternoon a little

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over a year before when she showed up on my doorstep holding a makeshift leash with a quivering young whippet on the other end.

Have you ever had someone in your life with an insatiable passion for rescuing animals? That's my friend, Connie. Miss Elizabeth was one of her rescues. She followed Connie home one day. Connie has this Pied Piper effect on stray animals. Since she already had five rescued cats living with her in a one-bedroom apartment, plus two feral cats she fed outside, she tapped me to give Miss Elizabeth a home, a decision I have never regretted. The whippet, however, was another story.

As soon as I opened the door and saw Connie standing there with the dog, a resolute "NO" formed on my lips. Before I could say anything Connie launched into one of her impassioned pleas for help.

"I need a favor," she said. "I was in Beverly Hills, heading for the Canyon to come home. The traffic was awful. And then I saw this poor dog trapped on the traffic Island. The cars were whizzing by, and she was running back and forth, back and forth, completely spooked. I couldn't just leave her there."

“No, Connie!” I said firmly.

“You know I’d keep her if I could, but with all my cats...”

“No, Connie,” I repeated.

“Oh Sunny,” she implored, “I’m not asking you to take her permanently. It would just be for a couple days.”

“No, Connie,” I said again.

“Please, Sunny. I can’t take her to the pound. Just look at her. She’s already traumatized. You’ve got a fenced-in yard. She’s a sweet dog, really she is. It will just be for a couple of days, I promise—just until I can find her owner.”

It was the remark about the pound that got to me. “All right,” I said. “But just for a couple of days.”

I should have known better. The promise of “just until I find her owner,” eventually became “just until I find someone to take her.” Months went by and I still had the hyperactive young whippet on my hands. Connie kept assuring me she was looking for someone to take the dog, but given the frequency with which she also told me how happy the animal seemed

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with me, and what a perfect pair we made, I doubted she was looking very hard.

I believe that once you name an animal, that animal becomes irrevocably yours. And so I refused to give the whippet a name. I referred to her simply as “the dog.” However, after three months I realized that this was not working. She needed a name.

I solved my dilemma by borrowing a name for her. The name I borrowed was one my daughter gave a miniature poodle we had rescued some years ago—Brandy. By giving the dog a second-hand name I wouldn’t actually be committing myself to a permanent relationship. At least that’s what I told myself.

I have to admit that Brandy did turn out to be a sweet dog. Tiger was terrified of her, but she got along well with him, and with Elizabeth, and she was good company for me. The problem was she just didn’t fit in with my work schedule—the traveling part. As any animal lover knows, you can leave cats at home for a couple of days. All you have to do is arrange for a friend to come by and feed them and change their litter box.

But a dog—well, a dog has to be walked, a dog has to be talked to, a dog has to have its belly rubbed. Dogs are people-dependent. That meant the expense of a kennel or house-sitter every time I left town.

There was one other problem with Brandy. Like greyhounds, whippets are born to run. And I am not a runner. Walk her? Yes—I could do that. But take her out for a run? Out of the question! So, bursting with pent-up energy, a couple of times a month Brandy would push through the back screen door and run furiously up and down the street, non-stop, for about ten or fifteen minutes. There was no use trying to catch her. My neighbors and I tried that; the more we tried, the more she made a game out of it. I worried about her being hit by a car, but fortunately there wasn't much traffic on the street where I lived. Eventually I learned to just let her get the running out of her system. When she had enough, she would come back to the house and scratch on the door to be let in.

A year went by and Brandy was still part of my little family, in spite of Connie's supposed efforts to find a home for her. Then the Writers Guild of America went on strike, and like all

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the other screenwriters in town I found myself out of work and on the picket line. Picketing is a tedious chore. To make it more palatable I would take Brandy along. Walking the picket line with me gave her a little exercise and an opportunity to socialize. And, as I said, she was good company.

One afternoon, while we were picketing at CBS, two young men approached us and introduced themselves. “We had to come over,” Tim Murphy said. “Your dog is the spitting- image of our Sophie. She was a real sweetheart.” Tim’s partner, Rob Green, explained that Sophie had contracted a serious kidney problem and they had to put her down. “We really miss her,” Rob said.

Brandy immediately took to these young men. I watched as they all three wrestled on the lawn. It was as though they had known each other forever. That’s when the idea struck me.

“Look,” I said,” when they brought her back to me, “Brandy really isn’t my dog. She was rescued by my friend. I’ve just been keeping her until we can find her a home. Would you two be interested in adopting her?”

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I knew from the way they smiled at each other that the idea resonated with them. There was some discussion about the two dogs they already had, and whether they would accept Brandy. Tim and Rob debated the problem for a few minutes, but in the end decided that Brandy was so much like the dog they had put down, who had been a part of their pack, that their other two dogs would have no problem with her.

It looked like a win-win situation: In Brandy, Tim and Rob had found an ideal replacement for a much missed dog. For Brandy, the arrangement meant a loving new home, one in which she would find companionship, and more importantly, get the kind of exercise an active dog like her needed. And for me? I had finally found a guilt-free solution to a vexing year-old problem.

The young men and I shook hands and exchanged phone numbers. I handed them the leash, and off they went with their new dog. Brandy's tail was wagging exuberantly. I took that as a good omen.

That had all happened a little over a month ago. Things were now just getting back to normal for me. The strike was

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finally over, and I was busier than ever trying to catch up on my assignments. It was a relief to be back to just two cats to care for and not have to worry about Brandy any more. So what in the world was I doing taking on responsibility for another animal? "I must be mad," I told myself. I would just call Leslie and tell her to find someone else to take the kitten. But then I would remember how cute she was, and how soft she felt in my hands... and before I knew it, reason went flying out the window.

I went back and forth like this, one day determined not to take the kitten, the next rationalizing that there was no good reason not to take her. She was, after all, a cat—not a dog that would need walking when I was home, and boarding when I was on the road. When Leslie finally called to say the kitten was ready to leave its mother I just happened to be in rationalization mode. And so the kitten came to live with us.

CHAPTER THREE

About her name—almost from the minute I brought her home, the kitten established herself as a champion climber, always seeking out the highest perch in the room. So I decided to call her Hillary, after the world-renowned mountaineer, Sir Edmund Hillary. (I had just read an article about some of his exploits.)

There is something about having a new kitten in the house that lifts the spirit. My new little one's playful antics kept me smiling. A piece of aluminum foil, a cardboard box, a strand of wool—everything triggered her curiosity. She would pounce, leap, attack, retreat, and do a summersault or a back flip. She would scurry, then creep, and finally sprawl with feigned exhaustion. My Hillary was a natural clown.

I have to admit that sometimes, especially when I was working on a tight schedule, Hillary's excessive energy and

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clowning became problematic—like when she would decide to perform her antics in the middle of the papers on my desk. Aside from the disruptive nature of her activities, there was always the temptation to take time out and play with her, an urge I often found impossible to resist. Still, looking back, it seems to me that the reduction of stress and the sheer pleasure I experienced when I gave into that urge more than compensated for any work time I may have lost.

As for Elizabeth and Tiger, they were not quite as enthusiastic about our new addition as I was, not that I could blame them. Hillary would stalk them, pounce on them as they slept, pester them to play, and intrude into their favorite hiding places. Elizabeth was more tolerant than Tiger. She allowed Hillary to share her favorite nesting place—the out box on my desk. Only occasionally did Miss Elizabeth swat the kitten, and then only when Hillary’s pranks became too annoying for her to tolerate.

Tiger, for the most part, ignored Hillary. When she approached him, he would snarl at her and move to another spot. There was one minor confrontation between the

perpetually climbing kitten and the tabby, a territorial dispute that led to a brief skirmish between the two. It involved the top of the refrigerator.

Tiger had first sought the safety of the fridge-top when Brandy lived with us. Terrified of the dog, the cat began spending a major part of his day (when he wasn't hiding under the bed or in the closet) perched on top of the kitchen appliance. He continued this practice even after Brandy was gone—that is, until Hillary came along.

Early on the kitten challenged Tiger for the spot. During the short-lived confrontation, Tiger took a few swipes at Hillary, but soon retreated and never again attempted to reclaim the space. Why he succumbed so easily to the demands of a little creature barely half his size I'll never understand.

Well, that's not totally true. Tiger's reaction was completely in character. When he was a kitten his more aggressive litter mates easily intimidated him. I was told that on occasion they had to be removed from their mother so Tiger could get his chance to be suckled. Full grown he was

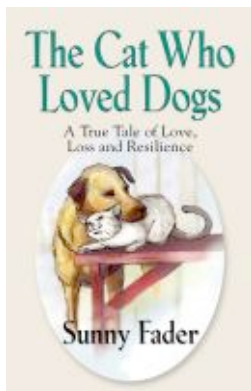
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sizable and sturdy, if a bit overweight. He certainly looked like a capable hunter, a cat who would be able to hold his own in a fight. But underneath this deceptive veneer lurked the same timid kitten that went out of his way to avoid confrontation. I'm afraid he didn't inspire much respect, not even from my grown children.

I remember walking into the kitchen one morning in another house I lived in once, out in the countryside, and finding Tiger there with a mouse in his mouth. I was so excited. He finally figured out what he was supposed to do. I called my son, Alan, to tell him the good news.

"Oh Mom," my son laughed, "get real. He probably just opened up his mouth to yawn and the mouse ran in."

Anyway, Hillary claimed the top of the refrigerator and Tiger spent most of the day hiding somewhere. As long as I gave each of my cats what they considered an appropriate part of my time, the three seemed to tolerate each other and all went well. Life moved along without incident—until one afternoon when I received an unexpected phone call that changed everything.



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