

Pooches and Kiddies is both the sequel to Good With Dogs and Cats and a stand-alone novel chronicling a momentous year in the life of Healing Weintraub and his colorful family and friends: human, canine, and feline.

Pooches and Kiddies

The Further Adventures of Healing Weintraub

by Todd Walton

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Pooches and Kiddies



*The Further Adventures
of Healing Weintraub*

Todd Walton

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Who's Who

Mercy, a town on the far north coast of California

The Mercy watershed was home to the Pomo people for thousands of years prior to the 1800s when European settlers arrived to log the redwood forests. In the 1930s, immigrants from Mexico began settling in and around Mercy, and in the 1950s and 60s Beatniks, Hippies, and Back-to-the-Landers discovered the area. Mercy today, population 2432, is a destination for tourists, retirees, and those who serve them.

Healing Weintraub, 70

The second child of Naomi and Ezra Weintraub, Healing was born in the little old farmhouse on two acres on Nasturtium Road at the south end of Mercy, and he has lived here his entire life. A promising actor in his youth, he chose not to pursue acting as a career and instead worked as a gardener until he was thirty-three when he became a grocer. He retired from the grocery business when he was sixty. For the last ten years he has occupied himself by giving accordion lessons, playing accordion in his band Mercy Me, growing vegetables and flowers, and continuing his lifelong work of helping cats and dogs resolve their conflicts with humans.

Naomi Weintraub, 92, Healing's mother

Born in Oxford, England, Naomi settled in Mercy with her husband Ezra when she was twenty and Ezra was twenty-four. They bought the derelict little old house on Nasturtium Road a few weeks after their arrival in Mercy and spent several years renovating the place, during which time they added a third bedroom. Naomi and Ezra lived in Mercy until they were in their sixties and inherited a house in Oxford, England where they then lived for fifteen years until Ezra died ten years ago, after which Naomi returned to Mercy and now lives in the cottage behind the little old house.

Jean Weintraub, 72, Healing's sister

Born in the little old house, Jean moved to England when she was sixteen. She has been married to Albert, an Archaeology professor, for fifty-three years. They live in Exeter and have two grown children. Ever since Naomi moved back to Mercy ten years ago, Jean visits Mercy every year for a month or so.

Jahera Weintraub, 64, Healing's wife

The child of an Algerian mother and Norwegian father, Jahera has been married to Healing for ten years. A professional photographer and calligrapher, Jahera lived in France for most of her life before moving to Mercy with her parents eleven years ago.

Tova Weintraub, 44, Healing's daughter

Born in the little old house, Tova is an actor and singer. Tova's mother vanished when Tova was eleven-months-old, leaving Healing to raise Tova with help from Naomi and Ezra. Tova lived in Portland Oregon for nineteen years where she was a veterinarian's assistant before returning to Mercy six years ago and marrying Jahera's son Lucien with whom she had the twins Raaz and Oz.

Raaziyah and Ozan Weintraub, 4, twins

Raaziyah a girl, Ozan a boy, they are known as Raaz and Oz, and they refer to Jahera as *Jadda*, which means *grandmother* in Arabic.

Lucien Dahl, 41

Born and raised in France, Lucien lived in Switzerland for several years before moving to Mercy six years ago. An art director for movies, Lucien relocated to Los Angeles shortly after Raaz and Oz were born. He returns to Mercy a few times a year for brief visits with Tova and the children.

Maahiah Dahl, 83, Jahera's mother

Born in Marseilles, Maahiah is Algerian. Her Norwegian husband Caspar Dahl died five years ago. An illustrator, baker, seamstress, and knitter, Maahiah lives across the street from the little old house in a cottage adjacent to the house where Tova lives with Raaz and Oz.

Darby Riley, 85

A close friend of the Weintraubs, Darby has resided in Mercy for sixty years after emigrating from Ireland, his antique shop a Mercy landmark for fifty years until he sold his building and retired to a house on the headlands.

Marjorie Kleinsasser, 83

A longtime Mercy resident and Darby's housemate.

Eliana Levine, 25

A superb violinist and Healing's longtime accordion student.

Justin Oglethorpe, 72

Healing's lifelong friend and the very tall owner of *Big Goose*, Mercy's largest pub.

Helen Morningstar, 70

A poet and Justin's wife, she, too, is Healing's lifelong friend.

Ruben Higuera, 61

The unflappable Sheriff of Mercy.

Ω

1. Raaz and Oz

On this last night of May, Raaz and Oz, four-year-old fraternal twins with olive skin and dark brown hair, are camping in the living room of the little old house on Nasturtium Road where Weintraubs have lived for seventy-three years.

Oz and Raaz usually spend the night in their house across the street, but while their mother Tova is in France making a movie, the twins and their great grandmother Maahiah are living on *this* side of the street where they feel safer and happier while Tova is away.

“Shafi?” says Raaz, calling from her sleeping bag. “I think Moosh *really* wants to hear a story.”

“I *know* he does because he told me,” says Oz, coming to the kitchen table where Healing is playing Scrabble with his wife Jahera, his mother Naomi, and his mother-in-law Maahiah.

“What did Moosh say exactly?” asks Healing, who is called *Shafi* by several members of Weintraub collective, *Shafi* meaning *healer* in Arabic.

Oz purses his lips as he concocts his answer. “He said he was waiting for a long time, but you never came.”

“How like him to put it that way,” replies Healing, smiling at his naked grandson. “Well translated.”

“When *are* you coming?” asks Oz, impatiently. “So I can tell Moosh and Socrates who also wants to hear a story.”

“I’ll be there in a few minutes,” says Healing, exchanging looks with Jahera. “Please ask the dogs to be patient.”

“I’ll try,” says Oz, returning to the living room. “Only it might not work.”

“Go on, Shafi,” whispers Jahera. “You have no hope of overtaking your mother. None of us do.”

*

Healing builds up the fire and settles into the rocking chair on the edge of Raaz and Oz's camp composed of air mattresses, sleeping bags, knapsacks, pillows, and flashlights. Raaz's knapsack contains clean clothes for tomorrow, an orange, an apple, and a small jar of nuts and raisins. Oz's knapsack contains these same items, minus clothes, because he refuses to wear clothing.

There are five dogs, medium-sized mixed-breeds, arrayed around the campers: Mendelssohn, eleven, known as Moosh, Socrates, ten, Puccini, six, and the siblings Tabinda and Kadan, both twelve.

"Moosh?" asks Healing, speaking to Mendelssohn, a handsome golden brown dog with black markings. "Did you have a particular kind of story you wanted to hear?"

Mendelssohn looks at Healing to say *The sound of your voice will suffice.*

"About Oziyah and Rozan," says Raaz, snug in her sleeping bag. "Solving a mystery."

"They use microscopes to get clues," says Oz, who has yet to lie down. "And telescopes."

"Do they have dogs?" asks Healing, as if he doesn't know.

"Of course they do," says Raaz, exasperated by the question. "Goosh and Plato and Govinda and Paganini and Nadak. They help solve the mystery."

"Usually," adds Oz, falling to his knees on his sleeping bag. "Sometimes they solve the mystery using special inventions."

"Where would you like this story to take place?" asks Healing, rubbing his chin to denote deep thinking. "Bulgaria?"

"Not Bulgaria," giggles Raaz. "All the stories are in Mercy, only not *this* Mercy but almost."

"Their house is across the street like our house," says Oz, crawling into his sleeping bag. "Only they have a laboratory for experiments and inventing things."

“This wouldn’t happen to be a story I’ve already told you, would it?” asks Healing, squinting suspiciously at his grandchildren. “Sounds very familiar.”

“Not the *same* story,” explains Raaz. “But *kind* of like the last one when they found buried treasure.”

“Only *not* with a scary tunnel,” says Oz, squirming in his bag. “Scary things are better for daytime stories.”

“Got it,” says Healing, clearing his throat. “Buried treasure, no scary tunnel.”

“But still exciting,” adds Raaz, closing her eyes to imagine the story.

“Maybe *you* would like to tell the story,” says Healing, addressing both of them.

“I could *start* the story,” says Oz, getting out of his sleeping bag and standing with his back to the fire. “But only the beginning.”

“Please,” says Healing, listening intently.

“One day Oziyah and Rozan were pulling carrots,” begins Oz, miming the pulling of carrots, “when Goosh came running up to them very excited. ‘What is it, Goosh?’ asked Rozan, and then...”

Oz pauses momentarily and Raaz says, “Now you tell the rest, Shafi.”

*

Healing rises at dawn, dons shorts and T-shirt, and tiptoes down the hall to the open doorway of the guest room where Maahiah is sleeping in the queen-sized bed with Raaz and Oz on either side of her, the children having abandoned the living room floor in the middle of the night for the comfort of sleeping with their great grandmother.

Armed with a large basket, Healing opens the kitchen door and waits for the dogs to go out ahead of him before he crosses the deck

and goes down the two wide steps into the large backyard where the vegetable garden is in full summer glory.

While the dogs wander about, Healing releases the fourteen hens from their coop into the scratch yard and sings *Oh What A Beautiful Morning* in Spanish.

Now Naomi, still spry at ninety-two, emerges from her cottage in her usual attire of long-sleeved shirt and corduroy trousers, her snow-white hair in a ponytail.

“Have you brought in the paper, dear?” she asks, looking over the tops of her wire-framed glasses at him, her British accent distinctly posh.

“No, but I heard a mighty thud on the front porch moments ago,” he says, his accent a mild version of his mother’s.

“Then I shall go straight in,” she says, breathing deeply of the cool morning air. “Rather than go round to the front where the paper has been landing in the rhododendrons of late.”

Now Raaz and Oz come charging out the kitchen door, Oz naked, his hair long and unruly, Raaz wearing a blue skirt and emerald green blouse, her hair in pigtails.

“You’re just in time to help gather eggs,” says Healing, which prompts the children to race across the yard to the coop.

“My goodness you are fleet,” says Naomi, watching her great grandchildren run by.

“Gently now,” says Healing, following the children. “Those eggs will get broken for our omelets soon enough.”

*

Omelets consumed, Jahera and Maahiah and the children commandeer the kitchen table for drawing with crayons on butcher paper while Naomi and Healing walk to the pond and sit on the old wooden bench to confer about the current dilemma facing the family: Oz’s refusal to wear clothing under any circumstances.

“Like it or not, we live in a society that frowns upon public nudity after infancy,” says Naomi, shaking her head in dismay. “I fear Oz’s obstinacy in this regard is verging on sociopathic. Do you agree?”

“At this point,” says Healing, angrily, “I find Tova and Lucien’s handling of the situation far more troubling than Oz’s refusal to wear clothes, since it was *their* behavior that launched his career as a nudist.”

“Are you referring to Lucien rarely being here?” asks Naomi, unaccustomed to Healing being so angry.

“I am referring to Lucien who, on those rare occasions when he’s here, dotes on Raaz and either ignores Oz or is harshly critical of him. This inequity reached its zenith at the twins’ third birthday party when Lucien was, as usual, showering Raaz with attention and ignoring Oz. So Oz took off all his clothes and immediately got *lots* of attention from Tova begging him to put his clothes back on and from Lucien threatening to spank him. And the brave little boy hasn’t worn a stitch of clothing since. For fourteen months!”

“During which time Tova has repeatedly asked you not to intervene, and you have acquiesced to her wishes,” says Naomi, who has unbounded faith in her son. “But now, at last, she *has* asked for your help, though it pained her greatly to admit that she and Lucien botched things. May I know how you plan to proceed?”

“I will take Oz into the wilderness,” says Healing, gazing eastward at the forest ascending the coast range. “Where we will get to the bottom of things.”

*

When the crayon masterworks are affixed to the wall next to the parrot cage in the sunniest corner of the kitchen, Jahera announces that she and Raaz are going shopping and then meeting friends for lunch at *Café Brava*.

“Not fair,” says Oz, pouting. “Why can’t I go?”

“If you wear shorts and sandals you can,” says Raaz, nodding encouragingly. “But they don’t let naked people into the café. Do they, Jadda?”

“No, they don’t,” says Jahera, shaking her head.

“I hate you,” says Oz, storming out the back door.

“He did *not* mean that, Raaz,” says Maahiah, pausing in her bread making. “He’s having a difficult time and spoke out of anger. You know he loves you very much.”

“I know,” says Raaz, sadly. “If people would let him go places naked he wouldn’t get mad.” She shrugs. “But they won’t.”

*

Healing finds Oz at the pond with Mendelssohn and Puccini, the dogs watching the little boy throw rocks into the water, something he knows he’s not supposed to do.

“I’m sorry, Shafi,” says Oz, dropping the rock he was about to throw. “I just got so mad. How come *she* gets to go and I don’t?”

“Why do you think?” asks Healing, sitting on the old wooden bench that has stood near the water’s edge since Healing and his sister Jean helped their father dig the pond sixty years ago.

“Because you have to wear clothes,” says Oz, snarling. “Stupid.”

“I was thinking we could take a hike up Trout Creek to Kingfisher Pool and have a swim. Promising to be another hot day. Sound good?”

“Can we take a picnic?” asks Oz, climbing onto Healing’s lap.

“A feast of hummus and crackers and apples and oranges,” says Healing, putting his arms around his grandson.

“Can we take the dogs?” asks Oz, starting to cry.

“No,” says Healing, gently rocking the little boy. “They’re not allowed in that particular state park.”

“Why not?”

“Their scent scares the wild animals, and their piss and poop is not good for the environment there, so we’ll leave them here and take them to the beach later on.”

“But *I* can go naked there,” says Oz, defiantly. “Can’t I?”

“Yes you can,” says Healing, speaking quietly. “As naked as you want to be.”

*

Wearing size-appropriate knapsacks, Healing and Oz walk seven blocks from Nasturtium Road to Onyx Lane from where they enter Mercy River State Park and take the trail that follows Trout Creek up a steep incline through a forest of redwoods.

“This is more fun than stupid *Café Brava*,” says Oz, leading the way, the soles of his feet as tough as leather.

“Certainly different,” says Healing, dressed in shorts, T-shirt, sandals, and a broad-brimmed sunhat. “Though not necessarily better.”

“But *you* like it better, don’t you Shafi?” asks Oz, looking back at Healing.

“Today I do,” says Healing, breathing deeply of the forest air. “Though some days I like nothing better than going to the café and meeting friends and having a scone.”

“I like doing this better *every* day,” says Oz, emphatically. “Much better.”

*

When they get to Kingfisher Pool at the base of little Kingfisher Falls, they leave their knapsacks and Healing’s clothes on the rocky beach and jump into the water, Healing as naked as Oz.

After a good long bathe, they sit in the sun and eat hummus and crackers and olives, their spirits exalted by the wilderness.

“Looking forward to going to school?” asks Healing, savoring a section of orange. “Making new friends?”

“I’m not going to school,” says Oz, haughtily. “They make you wear clothes and I’m never wearing clothes ever again.”

“Why not?”

“I hate them.”

“*Hate* is a strong word, Oz. Why do you hate clothes?”

“They feel bad. They make me itch.”

“Do they? Even a nice cotton T-shirt and cotton shorts? That’s what I like to wear when it’s warm, and then layers of cotton when it’s cold. I’m a cotton man. Wool and polyester make me itch. But not cotton.”

“Why are you talking about this?” says Oz, glowering. “You never do.”

“I’m talking about this, Oz, because it’s time for you to start wearing clothes. Not at home if you don’t want to, but out in the world and at school and when you come on cases with me.” He gives Oz a serious look. “I wanted your help with Helen’s cat, but I couldn’t take you with me because you wouldn’t wear clothes.”

“Why do I have to?” says Oz, trembling with rage. “Dogs don’t wear clothes. Cats don’t wear clothes. Only stupid people do.”

“That’s because we don’t have fur covering our bodies. Moosh and Puccini and Socrates and all the dogs and cats wear coats every minute of their lives. If they didn’t have fur coats they’d catch cold and be miserable.”

Oz considers this. “Why don’t people have fur?”

“It’s a great mystery,” says Healing, nodding sagely. “Our ancestors had fur, but for some reason we stopped having it except on our heads and in a few other places, and now the only way humans can survive in a climate like ours is to wear clothes.”

“I don’t want to,” says Oz, despondently. “Please don’t make me, Shafi.”

“Tell you what,” says Healing, handing Oz a section of orange. “I brought along a beautiful green cotton T-shirt Maahiah made for you, your favorite color, and some brown cotton shorts she made for you just like mine, and you can stay barefoot unless you want to go inside somewhere, in which case I brought along some sandals for you. If you’ll give these clothes a try, we’ll go to the animal shelter and see if they have something you might want to take home with you.”

“A puppy?” gasps Oz, who has been begging for a pup since he was two.

“If you’ll give wearing clothes a chance, you can have a puppy.”

“I’ll try, Shafi,” says Oz, starting to cry. “I won’t like it, but I’ll try.”

*

In the animal shelter, Oz chooses a darling female pup, a mix of Border Collie and German Shepherd.

Healing nods his approval. “Excellent choice, Oz.”

“I think we better get a puppy for Raaz, too,” says Oz, beaming at Healing. “Or she’ll be very jealous.”

“How thoughtful of you,” says Healing, taking the female pup from Oz. “By the way, how are those clothes feeling?”

“Okay,” says Oz, giving a little shrug before going in search of another pup. “I’ll get used to them.”

*

When all the members of the collective are snug in their beds that night and the pups are sequestered in a small pen in the living room with the older dogs watching over them, Healing does some stretching on his yoga mat on the bedroom floor while Jahera sits up in bed reading *The People*, a novel about a small band of humans living in the Kalahari Desert thirty thousand years ago.

“The little boy will be naked in public no more,” says Healing, rolling up his mat and stowing it under the bed. “And our dog population is replenished.”

“These people were naked all the time,” says Jahera, looking up from her book as Healing climbs into bed. “The women made beads from ostrich-egg shells and strung them on strands of leather to wear around their waists, and the men wore nothing at all.”

“I seem to recall it was warm there most of the time,” says Healing, closing his eyes to imagine the Kalahari. “When I read that book some years ago.”

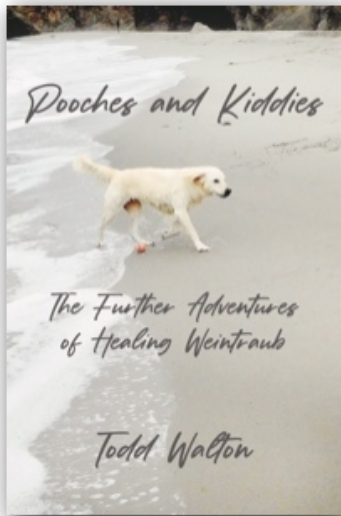
“No,” says Jahera, putting the book on her nightstand and turning off her light. “The days were warm, but the nights could be very cold and the people slept close to each other by their fires, which was all that saved them from the lions, and sometimes even their fires didn’t save them.”

“No wonder we love having a fire.”

“I feel such a strong kinship with these people, as if I’m reading about a life I once lived.”

“I felt the same way when I read that book,” he says, embracing her. “No wonder we get along so well. We both remember the old way.”

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