

The Cat in the Window

And Other Stories of the Cats We Love

Callie Smith Grant



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grant Rapids, Michigan 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Grant, Callie Smith.

The cat in the window : and other stories of the cats we love / Callie Smith Grant.

pages cm

Summary: "A heartwarming collection of true stories about the connections between humans and their cats"— Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-8007-2180-0 (pbk. : alkaline paper)

1. Cats—Anecdotes. 2. Cat owners—Anecdotes. 3. Human-animal relationships—Anecdotes. I. Title.

SF445.5.G73 2013

636.8—dc23

2013023243

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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This book is dedicated to my wonderful in-laws,
Joan and Jack, who truly treat me like a daughter.
Thanks so much for your love and support.

And it is dedicated to all the heroes
at humane societies, shelters,
and rescue organizations
whose ultimate goal is a world
in which such places
are no longer needed.

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Introduction

Callie Smith Grant



Let's put to rest the silly competition between cats and dogs—or rather, between cat people and dog people.

I realize that many people consider themselves either a cat person or a dog person (I'm not one to choose sides; I'm a fan of both). But let's agree that cats and dogs are unique creations, made so differently they really should not be compared to each other at all. That said, here's an interesting fact: American homes have far more cats than dogs. Not that we're competing, of course!

I am one lucky person in that I get to curl up and read story after story about this very cool beast, the cat—and then pass the really good stories on to you, the reader. As you read on, you'll find cat stories as varied as the fur patterns on cats—some charming, some serious, and everything in between. You'll meet cats who show up at what seems to be an appointed time—not just for the cat, but also for the human in some kind of need. You'll read stories about cats finding just the right home and

humans finding just the right cat. There are stories from moms whose interactions with cats help them and their families in surprising ways. One cat lives happily in a fourth-grade classroom and becomes a teacher of sorts himself. I'm always excited to find a story where a cat directly saved a life, and that's here, too. Sometimes a cat shows up mysteriously, sometimes it's not so mysterious—just blessed—but often it seems that the Creator of the beasts of the earth directed a cat's padded feet straight to where the cat needed to go.

It is always my hope that these stories will not only be an entertaining read for you, but might also prompt you to adopt another deserving cat if you can. I know the many writers in this book who went to their local shelters to find their special companion will be inspiring to you. You'll even meet one writer who rescues and fosters kittens and cats—an amazing 1,200 of them so far!

This is a book filled with felines wherever they may be and however they came about. In these pages are indoor cats, outdoor cats, pampered cats, working cats, stray cats, litters of cats—cats who live in houses, on porches, in barns, in laps, or wherever else they may land. But let's still encourage cat people to spay and neuter and to consider keeping a beloved cat indoors. Let me take a minute to remind us all of the following three facts: Too many unwanted kittens are born every day, a cat has a better quality of life when it's been spayed or neutered, and most cats live better and longer lives if they live indoors.

Now, before you curl up in your chair and read on, let me share one more thing about the dog-and-cat competition. I know I started out saying we should put it to rest, but before we do that, let's have a chuckle. My first two animal-themed anthologies

included a book of cat stories and a book of dog stories that were published at the same time at Baker Publishing Group. It became kind of fun at the publishing house to track how the two books sold side by side. This tracking, of course, has a whiff of that competition between those calling themselves dog people or cat people.

So which book sold better? The dog book. At first. Then sales of the cat book not only caught up with the dog book, they actually took over.

Steve Oates is a marketing man at Baker—and a man who keeps a photo of his cat on his cell phone and grows his own catnip. I've received many fun emails regarding the feline world from Steve over time, but here's my favorite. He copied me on an email he wrote to Dwight Baker, president of Baker Publishing Group and an animal lover himself, regarding the ongoing sales of my first two books, and it went like this:

Please correct me if I'm not reading the numbers correctly, but it appears that the sales of these books are pretty much just like cats and dogs themselves. The dog wagged his tail and was eager to get started, but the cat, with a slower and steadier approach, has now handily surpassed the dog in usefulness.

Dwight replied:

If these books behave in the retail stores in the manner of their subjects, the dog book leaps on incoming customers, barking and slobbering. The cat book will sit apart from the entire scene, waiting patiently for the approach of a customer who is worthy of consideration. Most people will fail to reach acceptable standards as a book buyer, regardless of their income or intent.

Are cat people surprised?

Introduction

I hope you have as nice a time reading these stories as I did pulling them together. And may God bless you and your pet—or in your endeavors to pair up with the perfect one.

A Wise Man Said It

“There are two means of refuge from the misery of life: music and cats.”

—Albert Schweitzer



The Cat in the Window

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Suffice it to say that a lot of unfortunate factors conspired together in the case of Percy the cat. The details aren't necessary to this story, really, because in the end, they simply added up to one thing: Percy needed to pack up his pet carrier and move to a new home.

That's where I came in. Percy's human was an old friend of mine who was in the middle of some hard life events. For weeks I had been asking my friend what I could do to help. "Nothing," she told me, "but thanks for asking." Then one day she said with some hesitation, "Well, there is something . . . can you find Percy a new home?"

It is not easy to re-home any cat, much less a nine-year-old cat who sheds big time and yowls a lot, so I knew what I was in for. I couldn't take Percy myself, since I already live with two aging cats—and I knew I couldn't throw a new cat into that mix. But I nevertheless immediately promised my stressed friend I would find Percy a home—and if not, I would take him to my

local Humane Society, which I knew would not euthanize a cat simply because he's hard to place.

"Send me a picture of him to show people," I told my friend, and soon a photo arrived. Percy was a white long-haired male with gold eyes. He was half Maine coon, so he was a big, handsome guy, except for a wilted ear from a previous ear infection. But the picture I received did not exactly showcase Percy's positive features. It was a head shot of the cat from the neck up, glaring directly at the camera with his eyes half closed and that one ear crumpled down. This wasn't a photo; it was a mug shot. All it needed was a prisoner ID number across the bottom.

And yet people responded to that picture very positively. The wilted ear definitely got the "Awww . . ." response from anyone who saw it. My friends at the Humane Society liked the picture too and were very positive about Percy's prospects. They assured me that I most likely would find him a home, and if not, they would. "White cats are easier to place," they told me, "especially ones with the Maine coon lineage." That took the pressure off, but I knew it was preferable to find Percy a home, not a cage.

Here was the odd thing: I didn't actually know Percy. Even though he had been with my friend for his entire life, I never saw him. I love cats, but this cat always hid when I visited. In Percy's entire nine years, I'd only seen a streak of white at his home. In order to find him the right home, I felt I needed somehow to know him.

During my next visit to Percy's home, I asked to see him and was shown to the bedroom where Percy was perched on the only windowsill in the small apartment. He liked it there, watching birds in good weather or leaning against the window in winter sun. I spoke his name. He took one look at me and quickly left his window perch to slink under the bed. That was

the end of that. The next visit a couple weeks later, the same thing happened—Percy slept in the window until I entered the room and spoke to him. Down he went and under the bed, not to be seen for the rest of my visit.

I was feeling some concern about this. I lived a hundred miles away and could only put so much time into this getting-to-know-you activity and still hold down a job. But, as the cliché goes, three times a charm, and indeed the third visit proved to be fruitful. This time I found Percy not in the window but on top of the queen-sized bed, curled up on a corner. I stood in the doorway of the bedroom, and he looked up at me with half-opened eyes.

I once knew a self-described Crazy Cat Lady who insisted that you should always tell a cat what you're about to do before you act. So I did. I stayed in the doorway and spoke gently. "Percy, you need to let me know you so I can find you a new home."

Percy watched me, but this time he stayed put. I moved to the bed and perched on the opposite corner. He remained where he was, watching. I slowly stretched out on my side to lower myself to his level. He watched me, and he stayed.

Now I remembered a cat behaviorist on TV saying that when approaching a strange cat, take off your eyeglasses if you wear them and extend the stems to the cat so it can sniff "who" you are.

Well, why not? I took off my glasses and extended the stems across the bed to Percy. He immediately leaned forward and sniffed with great interest the right stem, then the left one, then the right one again, then the left one again. Then he shocked me by flopping onto his side and showing me his belly.

What to do? First I talked to him. "Oh, Percy," I cooed, "you are a handsome boy." Then I reached out and scratched under

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his chin, his cheeks, his forehead, keeping all action above the neck. He stretched and purred and flexed his big toes in obvious feline bliss. I continued to say glowing things to him while he preened: “What a gorgeous guy you are, Percy. My goodness. You are one magnificent creature. Anyone would like to have you.”

For nearly five minutes I praised Percy while he stretched and purred and flexed his hammy feet. Then he fixed his golden eyes on mine and looked suddenly startled. I imagined him thinking, *What am I DOING?* He hurled himself off the bed and under it.

But that was enough for me to feel complete confidence that I could represent Percy honestly and positively to someone who might want him. In fact, had I not had my aging lady-cats at home, I would have taken him myself. I drove home encouraged.

Back home I talked about Percy to a couple I knew, and they were interested at first. Then the husband finally shook his head. “No, I really don’t want a long-haired cat,” he said. I chose not to be discouraged. The good news is that they got so interested in acquiring a cat that they went to the county animal shelter and picked out a delightful short-haired cat for themselves—one that otherwise may never have been adopted. So because Percy needed a good home, another cat got a good one.

I had to go on an out-of-state trip before I found Percy a home. The day before the trip, my cat-sitter friend, Mary Ann, was sitting at my table chatting. I talked to her about Percy’s mug shot and showed it to her just for giggles. Mary Ann looked at it for a minute and said, “I want that cat.”

I was surprised. “You do?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“Do you want to think about it?”

“No, I don’t need to think about it. I want that cat.”

This possibility had not occurred to me because Mary Ann’s previous living situation hadn’t allowed her to have pets. But she had recently bought her own house, so this was very fortunate timing. I began to make plans to pick up Percy and transport him a hundred miles from the only home he’d ever known to move in with Mary Ann. And for a variety of reasons, I was the one who would need to do it. I emailed many cat-lover friends and asked for their prayers and for any advice to help Percy and me pull this off without too much misery.

The big day came, and I drove the hundred miles north to my friend’s place. That day, for the first time, Percy showed himself to me voluntarily. Apparently he knew my voice and my scent now, because he sashayed into the living room where I sat, stuck his tail straight up, yowled at me, and rubbed on me. This was the first time I’d ever seen Percy up and walking, and what a gorgeous cat. He had that big lion’s chest of a Maine coon and a full, stunning coat. He was over sixteen pounds, and yet he was a lean sixteen pounds—a whole lot of Percy was fur. He rubbed and rubbed on me, back and forth, and I scratched him all over his big handsome body. Then he took himself back to his window.

Hours later, my friend and I silently agreed that the time had come. We grabbed Percy and his carrier—a nice roomy dog carrier, fortunately—and did the deed. He clawed at me going in and drew some blood, but we got him in. Then the yowling began. I draped the carrier with towels that smelled like his home, tucked him onto the bucket seat next to me in the car, waved good-bye to my friend, and headed out. It was raining as I drove Percy to the interstate. I talked to him until we got on the highway, but he had ceased his vocalizing. So I stopped

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talking. I'd had fears of frightened yowling for the next two hours, but he never made a peep the entire trip. Halfway there, I saw that he'd dozed off.

At our destination, I lugged Percy through the rain to the front door of Mary Ann's tidy little cottage and into her open, eager arms. This house was completely cat-ready—toys, treats, brush, places to perch, you name it. Of course, we should have left Percy crated for his own cat-insecurity reasons for a while, but Mary Ann and I simply got too excited. We opened the carrier door. Ta-da! Of course, Percy immediately shot under the bed.

Mary Ann and I took that time to go over the house. Everything was spot-on ready for the big guy, and I was particularly pleased to count ten windows Percy could enjoy. I left after a while, and I learned that Percy ventured out about ten minutes later. He examined every room in the house, and then he cozied up to Mary Ann, who brushed and brushed him. They fell in love.

It wasn't easy to merge their lives at first. We really should have gradually introduced Percy to the new home, and I've since learned that a lot of his yowling and acting out for the next two weeks was his way of trying to find his place in his new world. It took some time for him to feel comfortable with the windows, too. I was thinking like a human, of course—going from one window on the fourth floor of a city apartment to ten windows on the ground floor in the country sounded to me like the Big Time for a cat. It was that, but it was also unnerving and unsettling for Percy. It took a couple weeks of all-night yowling with the patient Mary Ann using ear protection before Percy finally turned a corner, settled in, and settled down.

Now the big white cat enjoys all the windows of his home. When Mary Ann mows the lawn, he moves from open window

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to open window to watch her work and to breathe in the fragrances of the outdoors. He watches wild life moving about in the yard. He runs around the house in the full moon at night, window to window. He talks to his new human, who adores him and brushes him, and he follows her around the house like the cool companion he is. They're still in love.

In the end, I'm pleased to tally up that, because of Percy, not far from my house live two other happy cats and their three happy owners. And I feel pretty good myself.



*a full moon tonight
cat in window cannot sleep
neither can humans*