

## Two Days of Freedom

It happened so quickly, and it could have happened many times before. In the blink of an eye, and with barely an inch to spare, he made it! So, through the small space of daylight provided by the slightly open front door, he darted to freedom. This was easy, in fact, easier than he thought. The lady with the pony tail had stepped out. She was somewhere out there, and if she followed her usual pattern, she wouldn't return until can opener time. He could easily be back by then. That is, if he wanted to return.



They had been good to him, and for that he would remain grateful. He didn't particularly like the fact that they had been responsible for the removal of his front claws. After all, isn't hanging on curtains part of the fun of being a cat? Well, think again. It just doesn't work when you only have claws on your hind legs! But there must be more to life than the inside of that house, and this was the day he was about to find out.

The abrupt change in temperature startled him. The sun that looked so inviting from his place by the window was much warmer than he had imagined. He was keenly aware of the air around him. It seemed to be able to do so much more outside than he had ever remembered it doing in the house. It picked up leaves, papers and blades of grass and swirled them around in amusing patterns, making the things they moved easy targets to chase and pounce upon. This was fun for a while, but his thoughts kept going back to the house and the lady with the pony tail and the big man. They would toss rubber mice and balls of string at him as they sat on his favorite chair. It was his chair during the day, but during the evening, he was forced to surrender it as the two of them sat and watched that big box. Maybe it was that box that gave him the first inclination that life did offer much more than just waiting for the sound of the can opener each evening.



Through the window of the big box, he could see and hear sounds of a world he had yet to experience. Everything appeared so different than what he saw in the house he shared with the big man and the lady with the pony tail. Outside! That's where all the really neat things must be. Days of watching, anticipating and waiting for just the right opportunity had paid off. He was now about to explore everything that box showed him was out there, and he was going to make the best of the situation.

## The Great Outdoors

Where should he go first? The footing seemed strange. He didn't find most of the soft footing he was used to. The ground was soft in spots, that is, where there was grass, and it was hard where the grass stopped. He spotted a tree, and thought it would really be neat to climb it. This was something he had seen cats in the box do. They made it look simple. All he would have to do was take a running leap and grab onto the tree's trunk. Once he did that, getting to the first branch would be a snap. He quickly learned that life can be cruel. The jump was expertly done, but when it came to grabbing the bark of the tree, two of his legs held like those of a well equipped mountain climber, but his front paws grappled and groped, but did not hold. It figures, anything named after a dog just wasn't going to work for him. The world seemed quite different up-side-down!



## Street People

It didn't take long for him to meet one of the "street people." Although he didn't know the name for this one, it resembled a rather pathetic creature as it rummaged through the large plastic bags of trash at the point where the soft grass turned hard. He didn't look hungry. In fact, he was quite fat with short legs, and he actually waddled when he walked on two flat feet. So, why was he ripping at those bags? It wasn't can opener time. But he continued to eat anyway, knowing that he was being watched. When Buggie attempted to join him, he scoffed. Apparently he wasn't in the mood for making new acquaintances. So, he decided to spend his newly found freedom elsewhere.



The weather was changing. From out of nowhere, the skies darkened, and the air moved free flying objects around him much more quickly. He didn't like what was happening. As he stood there, he felt more alone than he had ever remembered. The heat of the day changed rapidly to a damp, driving cold rain that made him shiver. There was nowhere to go. There was no big chair, no bed, and no lady with the pony tail to gently stroke him behind his ear. Not out here anyway. So, freedom does have a price, and if he really wanted to experience it, he would have to toughen up.

Looking for shelter, he was startled by a bright flash of light followed by a resounding boom! He had never seen anything quite like it. Perhaps, one time, a man visited the big man, and he had a small black box that flashed like that, but the sound was different. Maybe this was something to fear! The combination of



wind, rain and flashing lightning brought a sense of confusion that he had ever experienced in his short, sheltered life, and he knew that he had to find a place to hide.

From his vantage point inside the tarpaulin covered boat “anchored” in a neighbor’s driveway, he rode out the worst of the storm. Instinctively, he knew it was safe to leave these friendly confines when the sound of the rain stopped pelting the canvas. So far, day one of freedom had produced few adventures and several challenges.

### Can Opener Time?

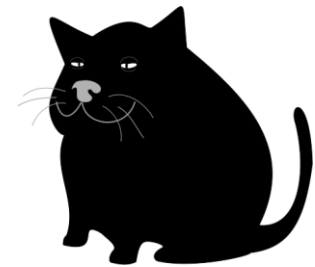
As the sun continued its journey toward the western reaches of the town of Pembroke Pines, he became acutely aware that it was can opener time. But on this day, the sound coming from inside him wasn’t purring, but the rumbling of his tiny tummy. The lady with the pony tail was probably standing in front of her cabinets picking out something for his dinner. But as fate would have it, Buggie would be eating out this evening.



The street has a language all its own. Those who depend on its resources to survive understand it well. Buggie had a keen sense of hearing. The cats were perhaps several blocks away, but make no mistake about it, they were cats! Members of his own species who shared much more in common with him than the big man and the lady with the pony tail.

### New Friends

With quick, graceful strides, he ran instinctively in the direction his ears told him to go. Through a neighbor’s yard, over a wooden fence, and on to the roof of a parked car, he finally spotted them. There were two. One was a large female with tan stripes and white “socks.” She had a collar with sparkling stones around it. The other was a jet black male. They seemed to be fighting over a red and white cardboard box with its former contents strewn about the street. As he approached, the two stopped fighting and in unison, slowly backed away from him and formed a semi-circle, protecting their feast. Somehow, they sensed that he was harmless and decided not to attack. What they also sensed was that he was hungry. Cats, unlike dogs, seem to



form a comradery of sorts when they are forced to survive on their own. Buggie approached them cautiously. The black cat nodded approvingly as if to say, “You better hang with us, buddy, because I don’t think you’ll make it on your own.” Both strays approached him. They sniffed him, rubbed against his sides, and did the usual things cats do to other cats when they first meet.

“Wassup?” said the black one.

“You’re new around here.” the female said.

“How can you tell?” Buggie responded, suddenly becoming aware that he was actually communicating with other animals.

“You’re too clean, and quite honestly, your street manners are far too polite. If you knew these streets, you would have run through here and grabbed some of these fine KFC leftovers before we knew what was happening.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that. Besides, how did you know it was time to eat? I didn’t hear the can opener.”

The black cat toned in, “Someone oughta slap you up-side the head! There ain’t no ‘time to eat’ out here in the street. Whatcha thinkin’? We ain’t got no catering service here. If you want to eat, dig in— this place only got two trash pick-ups a week, and the next one ain’t ‘til Friday.”

Buggie had never heard this kind of talk before. Dinner time at the house was so different, but as he was learning, so was just about everything else. He looked at his two new friends, wondering where their personalized bowls that had their names written on the sides were. Stunned, he watched them eat off the ground, something the lady with the pony tail would never tolerate.

“Is this really your dinner?” said Buggie.

“No, we go down to the Ritz and get served caviar by a waiter wearing a tuxedo and white gloves.” said the fat black cat. “This is just an appetizer.”

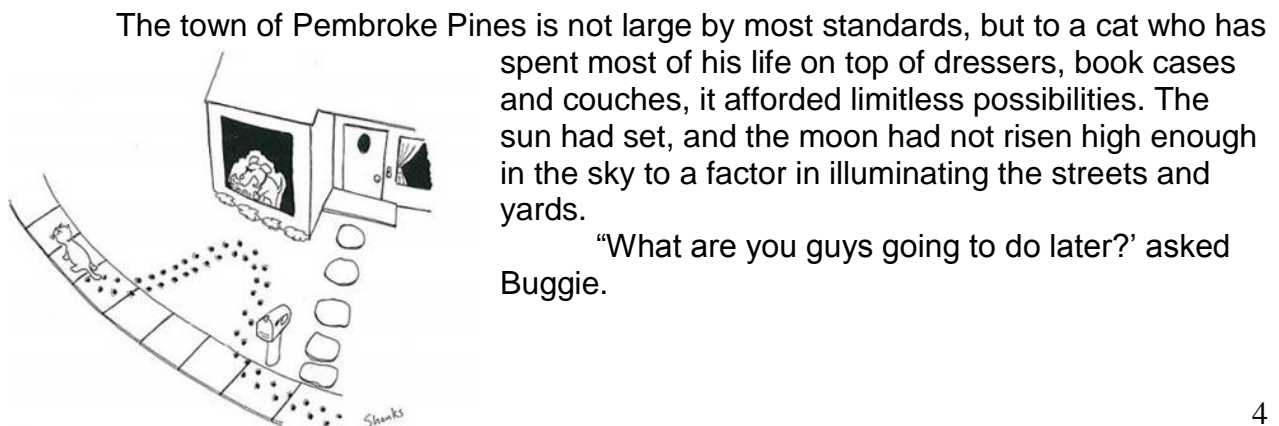
The female chimed in, “Don’t mind him. I always let him eat first. He gets what he wants, and in a few minutes, he falls asleep then I can eat whatever I need.”

“Well, it really doesn’t look too bad, maybe I’ll try some”, said Buggie.

“Don’t take all day to make up your mind, there won’t be nothin’ left!” said the black one. “This stuff sure is a lot better than that junk I used to eat when that crazy lady owned me and about ten other cats, Kibbles ‘n Bits. You probably heard the street version — Kibbles ‘n Bits, Kibbles ‘n Bits, Kibbles ‘n Bits, it gives you the sh\*ts.” Buggie joined in. He thought that freedom wouldn’t be all that bad once he got used to some new ways of doing things.

Once dinner was finished, the three cats were in the mood for adventure. Cats are nocturnal by nature, and Buggie’s biological clock was either twelve hours ahead or twelve hours behind the others. He realized that adjustments would be necessary.

## Cat Party!



“What are you guys going to do later?” asked Buggie.

“Probably getting into trouble,” said the female, “like we usually do.” Buggie wasn’t entirely sure how to take this remark. He hadn’t really been in trouble before, and wasn’t sure what would happen to him if he got caught doing something like that. He decided to follow the black cat, because he seemed to always have the answer.

They made their way through the front and back yards of the neighborhood, looking for something that would capture their interest and imagination. Within minutes, they spotted something unusual enough to warrant exploration. The black one saw it first.

“Lookie here! We done got a garage door that ain’t all the way closed.” This was not only an opportunity, but it could be some real fun. You see, cats that really know the street know what can happen to someone’s garage if they carelessly leave a way for them to get in and out. In human terminology, it’s called P A R T Y ! ! ! !

This was going to be some kind of night! After all, what were the humans that owned this place thinking about? As the black cat cautiously circled the opening and peered in from the side, he couldn’t believe his eyes. There were opened cans of cat food. (enough to feed a feline army) strategically placed under primitive animal traps. These were the kind of traps that consisted of a box tilted on edge, and held up by a stick with a string tied to it. Under each box, in plain view, was an open can of cat food.



The black cat whispered to himself, “My momma didn’t raise no dummy. What does this human think it’s going to catch with a trap like that? The only thing I know that be that dumb is a possum. Surely it ain’t gonna be no cat!” He made mental notes of the angles of each of the boxes and the length of string attached to each and quickly exited to rejoin his friends.

“So, what does it look like?” said the female.

“Momma, put on your party dress. We’ll be celebratin an’ eatin’ an’ eatin’ an’ celebratin.”

“I can’t wait!” said Buggie excitedly.

The trio decided to spy on the open garage door from the roof of a nearby tool shed. Because of Buggie’s markings, he positioned himself between the female and the black cat so he couldn’t be easily recognized from their vantage point. Cats knew that having a party in this garage would probably not be as easy as it first appeared. Perhaps an hour or more of observation would give them a clue as to what was really going on in there.



As the crescent moon rose above the shade trees that surrounded the tool shed, no activity was visible. The cats began to slowly approach the open door with a simple plan. They would get at least one can of premium cat food each, removing it from the trap before attempting to place its contents in their belly. If nothing happened, they would go for a second, third and a fourth if they wished. It was all for one, and one for all! Any sign of danger would be instinctively relayed among the group, and upon receiving this sign, they would quickly break for the opening at the bottom of the door.

The black cat went first. He moved to the left, followed by the female who padded quietly to the right. Buggie, still unsure of his exact role in this situation nervously followed the female. Even though the garage was dark by human standards, the cats had little trouble locating the cans of food as well as the traps. Buggie watched the female slowly crouch down on her stomach and extend her front paw until it made contact with the can of food. By the smell of it, it was liver. Yum! Even with his keen cat's sense of hearing Buggie could barely hear the gentle scrape of the can as it was slowly moved from the trap. Seeing the technique, he decided to move to the can and the trap just to the right of the female. Imitating her as best he could, he reached for the can and just like that — chicken morsels and salmon! It tasted so good that Buggie forgot one of the primary cat party rules: *Thou shalt not purr!*

It all happened suddenly. The bright light, the opening of the side door, and the appearance of the trap maker occurred within a split second. Although the cats had anticipated using an alternative plan in case of a problem, they didn't plan on this. Both the black cat and the female jumped, turned, and ran through the door opening as the trap maker began to reach for the electronic device that would eliminate their escape route. Buggie knew what he had to do, but he also sensed something wasn't right. As the garage door motor started to hum, he looked up, and to his surprise, he saw the lady with the pony tail, eyes wide, and mouth open — speechless.



His decision to run might not have been right, but he felt that it was the right one at the time. How could he betray his two new friends on his first day of freedom?

As the felines huddled together under a parked car and caught their breath, they could hear a sound that had meaning to only one of the three. They decided to slowly walk towards the covered boat where Buggie earlier had found shelter from the rain. Two of the three managed to find sleep immediately despite the faint repeated cries of the lady with the pony tail calling, "Buggie. . . . Buggie. . . . Buggie."

Morning came with fresh light that brought hearty appetites. Buggie did not sleep well that night. It wasn't just the black cat's snoring that interrupted his sleep, he was beginning to sense that perhaps his bonds to his new feline friends were not as strong as those he had with the lady with the pony tail and the big man.

## Ransom Note

As usual, the black cat took the lead in their search for breakfast. They walked for what seemed like an eternity, and they were still hungry.

"It ain't like it's Friday," said the black cat, "We might as well forget about findin' any trash. If I don't find something soon, I may stoop to stealin' some dog food, and you know how I feel 'bout that!"



They continued wandering in search of breakfast when the female spotted something that caught her attention.

"Hey, that's you!" nodding at a likeness of Buggie on a piece of paper attached to a telephone pole.

"No, it couldn't be. It is probably just another cat that looks like me. . . what a lucky guy!"

Their conversation by the pole with the "missing cat" poster was interrupted by someone who shouted to his companion, "Grab that one! It's the cat on the poster. We can get that hundred bucks they're offering for a reward."

The ransom note did not arrive in the traditional way. It was wedged between the door and the door jamb of the house that belonged to the lady with the pony tail and the big man. No one could be sure if it was genuine, but it was obviously the work of cold, calculating professionals.

**cat lover**  
**I've got your cat!**  
**if you ever want to see your dear little furry**  
**friend again, do as i say.**  
**put \$175. in unmarked 20 dollar bills in a brown**  
**bag. Leave it at the corner of pines & palm**  
**on friday afternoon at 4:00. Then wait for more**  
**instructions. Do not call the police or try to find**  
**me.**  
**I have a hungry pit bull!**

The situation was getting serious. Not only was all of Pembroke Pines looking for a clawless black and white cat, but because of the reward that was offered by the lady

with the pony tail, several impostors also showed up. The same day the ransom note was delivered, a little old lady showed up with a cat that looked exactly like the one pictured on the wanted poster. Her reward claim never materialized because the freshly applied white paint came off on the lady with the pony tail's hands. If she had only waited until the paint dried!

## Decisions

The black cat turned to Buggie and said, "Hey, kid, you seem up-tight."

"I don't know. I just don't think I belong out here. I can't fight. I don't have any front claws."

"So what!" he said, "Ain't nobody gotta know that. Let's say sumthin' happens and you're face to face with a bad-ass dog or a possum. All you gotta do is arch your back, hiss and spit."

"I don't think that'll work. Out here, I don't hear can openers, I can't lie on the big man's chair, and I hate getting wet. I want to go home!"

The female interrupted, "It's all right. Being out here isn't all it's cracked up to be. Believe me, I'd go home if I had one. But you're right. You should go home."

## Home Sweet Home

As the lady with the pony tail sat alone on the floor of her garage, a small black and white cat slowly approached and rubbed along her knee. Startled at first, she quickly embraced the cat and hugged him for what seemed like an eternity. But in reality, all was forgiven in a matter of seconds.

After a bath, Buggy was allowed to roam the house and claim his spot on the big man's chair. Hearing the can opener once again, he thought, "The big man was right, life *is* good!"

