



Cooper's Story

W. Bruce Cameron

Illustrations by
Richard Cowdrey



A Tom Doherty Associates Book
New York

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed
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cooper's story

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A Starscape Book
Published by Tom Doherty Associates
120 Broadway
New York, NY 10271

www.tor-forge.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Cameron, W. Bruce, author. | Cowdrey, Richard, illustrator.

Title: Cooper's story : a puppy tale / W. Bruce Cameron ;
illustrations by Richard Cowdrey.

Description: First edition. | New York : Starscape,
a Tom Doherty Associates Book, 2021.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021008850 (print) | LCCN 2021008851 (ebook) |
ISBN 9781250163387 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781250163370 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Dogs—Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Dogs—Fiction. | Animals—
Infancy—Fiction. | Service dogs—Fiction. | Human-animal relationships—Fiction. |
People with disabilities—Fiction. | Wheelchairs—Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ10.3.C1466 Co 2021 (print) |

LCC PZ10.3.C1466 (ebook) | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021008850>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021008851>

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at MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com.

First Edition: June 2021

Printed in the United States of America

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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I lived with my puppy brothers and sisters and Mother Dog. I had a human friend named Ava, and best of all, I had a dog friend named Lacey.

Lacey was the best playmate any dog ever had. This was something I knew the moment I met her, that we were destined to be together forever.

My littermates were like me, with thick grayish-white fur, but Lacey, who was my age, had a somewhat pushed-in snout; very short, coarse fur; and white on her face. My siblings seemed to feel Lacey was too different from us to play with, which was fine by me—I wanted her all to myself, anyway.

Lacey always wanted to do everything I wanted to do. She would spring on me and start wrestling at precisely the right moment. She knew the game Pin Your

Friend Down and Chew on His Ears and would play it with me until it was time to do something else. She knew how to grab a ball and run with it and let it fall out of her mouth so that it bounced between her paws. Then I'd lunge for it and she'd try to get it and whoever snatched up that ball with their teeth would run and run and run some more while Ava laughed and clapped.

All my littermates knew how to do was grab the ball and keep it to themselves.

There were lots of dogs where we lived, in pens of their own. Very few were puppies. The place was loud with their barking. They barked for attention. They barked because they were inside and wanted to go out. They barked because other dogs were barking.

None of them mattered to me—only Lacey. When we were all let out into the yard, I would stand still with my nose in the air until I found her scent. When I slept in my own pen with my mother and brothers and sisters, Lacey and I wrestled in our dreams.

"I think Lacey is your one true love, Cooper," Ava told me.

I didn't understand what Ava was saying, but I loved hearing my name and Lacey's name at the same time. It meant that Ava knew Lacey and I belonged together.

One day, Ava and Lacey and I were playing in the yard. Lacey had one end of a stick in her mouth, so I



grabbed the other end. We tugged each other around the yard, giving mock growls.

Ava giggled when the stick broke and Lacey staggered back. I ran to get a drink from the water bowl, and Lacey bounded over to me and jumped on me so my face was dunked in the bowl. I backed out and shook, and then I ran over to Ava to get some petting.

Lacey followed me for the same reason. Ava was very good at petting. Her fingers knew right where to scratch, along my chest and right at the base of my tail.

“Lots of people have true loves,” Ava told me as she gently scratched. “So I don’t see why dogs shouldn’t. Even puppies. You’ve always loved Lacey, Cooper. That’s why Dad makes sure you get to play together every day.”

I liked the way Ava smelled—sweet and spicy and flowery all at once. I crawled into her lap. Lacey climbed on top of me and sat on me until I shook her off. Ava lay back, and we all rolled around together in the grass.

“I bet I’ve got a true love, too, somewhere,” Ava whispered. “I bet I’ll find him one day.”

I grabbed another stick and ran around the yard so that Lacey would chase me. Which of course she did.

Lacey and I would be together always. Somehow, deep inside, I knew this to be true.

We weren’t together every single moment, of course. When we left the yard and Ava led us inside, she put

me in my pen with my family, and Lacey was in her pen with hers.

I slept happily, piled in a heap with my furry brothers and sisters, dreaming of playing with Lacey.

One morning, Ava and Dad arrived very early to feed us. I knew something unusual was going on, because they were both excited—Ava especially. Her excitement hummed off her skin. It made her voice high and eager. “Adoption fair day!” she told my littermates and me after

she poured food in our bowls. We surged forward to gobble it up. I had a lot of brothers and sisters—too many, in my opinion—and they all liked to eat just as much as I did. I had to shove Heavy Boy away from my bowl, and while I was doing that, White-Face Sister pushed her face where mine had been. She was always doing that. Black-Tail and White-Tail Sisters ate from the same bowl, as they usually did, and Grumpy Brother got a bowl all his own because he was not good at sharing.

I kept my eye on Heavy Boy, because after he’d eaten more than anybody else, he had a habit of seeking me out and sitting on my head. That’s why I thought of him as Heavy Boy.

“You’ll all have new homes!” Ava told us as we ate. I wagged up at her because I knew she was happy.

After breakfast and outside time with Lacey, we were put into our crates. Surely that was not what Ava

and Dad were excited about. There is nothing especially thrilling about crate time. It is nice for napping, though, so that's what I did, lying on top of Heavy Boy, which was so much more comfortable than the other way around.

The crate moved and jolted, which was strange. Crates did not normally do that. But I did not really feel like opening my eyes and investigating, so I just curled up tighter and slept deeper until all the jolting stopped.

Then all the grown-up dogs started barking. I heard Lacey yip, and I barked along with all the other dogs because if it was time for barking, I didn't want to be left behind. I didn't know *why* we were barking, just that we were barking.

"Settle down now!" Dad said. "Come on, Ava, let's get the crates out of the pickup."

Dad and Ava and some other humans I did not know picked up our crates and carried them a little way before setting them down. I looked around with interest.

We were outside, in the biggest yard I'd ever seen. I could not even catch sight of a fence, that's how big it was. Dad and Ava and their helpers arranged all the crates in the grass. Lacey's crate was next to mine, and I pressed close to the side of my crate so I could be near her. She did the same thing, and we touched noses through the cold wires and whined a little at each other,

partly out of nervousness, partly out of longing to get free of our crates and play and wrestle in the big, wide grass.

I couldn't bear to be separated from Lacey. We were supposed to be together, always. Ava knew this, and I expected her to let us out of our crates so we could run in this wonderful, huge yard. The other dogs could stay in their crates, especially my brother Heavy Boy. Let him sit on somebody else besides me. Lacey and I needed to be let out to play and play.

But that didn't happen. I was surprised at Ava and Dad. Usually, they understood dogs very well, but they didn't seem to understand that we needed to explore this new yard. Instead, they were very busy talking with lots of new people who were walking around and looking in all the crates and petting all the dogs.

A man and a woman came by our crate, and the man crouched down to look at us. "They're adorable! What breed?" he asked.

"Mostly malamute, I think," Dad told them. "Maybe some Dane, too."

"Going to be pretty big, then, huh?" the man asked. "We've got a small apartment, and there's no yard."

"Malamutes need room to run," Dad said. "Let me show you some of our other pups."

Dad walked away with the man. I looked over at

Lacey and saw that a girl was peering into her crate. She smelled a little older than Ava, and she had long, shiny dark hair that spread out across her back.

“Oh, you are the prettiest baby. You are so beautiful,” she whispered. She poked her fingers through the wires of Lacey’s crate, and for once, Lacey wasn’t paying attention to me. She licked the girl’s fingers and looked up at her with adoration. The girl gazed back with just the same kind of love in her face.

Ava was nearby, smiling. “That’s Lacey. My dad says she is probably spaniel mixed with something bigger, like boxer or Labrador,” she told the girl.

“She’s the one I want,” the girl replied.

Ava opened the door of Lacey’s crate, and the girl reached in and picked Lacey up, plopping her into her lap. Lacey squirmed and wiggled and put two paws on the girl’s chest so she could lick her under the chin. There was a lot of giggling, and Lacey’s tail wagged hard.

I could tell that this girl was nice. And she loved Lacey already. That was good! I pawed at my crate impatiently so that Ava would let me out, too. We could all play—Lacey and this new girl and me.

The girl swept Lacey up and rubbed her face on the top of Lacey’s head. “Yes, she’s the one!” she declared happily.

Ava was grinning. “Your mom and dad can fill out all the paperwork over there,” she said, pointing.

“Thanks!” The girl stood up and shook her long black hair out of her face. She turned and walked away.

She walked away carrying Lacey!

I jumped up. I barked. Something very strange and wrong was happening here. The girl was going somewhere with Lacey and leaving me behind!

Lacey, too, seemed to realize that something was wrong. She put her face over the girl’s shoulder, poking her nose through the curtain of sleek, dark hair. She stared at me as the girl carried her away, and I stared at her.

What was happening? Where was Lacey going?

Come back!

But Lacey did not come back. Before long, I couldn’t even *see* her.

I could not help myself—I cried and whined and yipped. I was frantic. Where was Lacey? I pushed my nose through the holes in the crate and sniffed, trying to find her scent as it faded away. Then I pawed at the sides of the crate, frantic to get out. I had to go find her! Didn’t any of the humans who were smiling down at me understand how wrong this was?

Ava was drawn by my crying. “Oh, Cooper. You miss Lacey, don’t you?” She poked her fingers in, and I licked them desperately. “Don’t worry, you’re going to have a people family of your own!”

I thought if she said Lacey’s name, it meant Ava was

going to take me to her, but I heard Dad call, “Ava!” and she left at a run.

After a long time, I turned away. Upset, I lay down and shoved my face into Mother Dog’s flank. She licked my head, which was a little comfort. But I wanted Lacey, and she was not there.

For as long as I could remember, Lacey and I had been together. More than any of my littermates, she was the one I cared about. I belonged with her.

I heard the door of our crate open a few times, but since I could smell that Lacey was nowhere near, I did not even bother to get up as Dad reached in to pick up one of my siblings. What did it matter what happened now? Lacey was gone!

After a while, Mother Dog yawned and rolled a little way away from me. I immediately missed the comforting press of her fur against me. I looked around to see that there were only three dogs in the crate now—Mother Dog, White-Face Sister, and me. My brothers and sisters had been removed from my life, just like Lacey.

Dad was standing outside the crate, and he opened it up and reached in and took White-Face Sister. He handed her to a tall, skinny man with some fur on his face, under his nose. The tall man laughed and hugged White-Face Sister. “Ready to go home, puppy?”

The man carried White-Face Sister away. If he had been the girl with long dark hair, I might have tried to

be taken myself, taken to Lacey, but I could smell the tall man had not been anywhere near my best friend.

Mother Dog watched everything alertly, but she did not make a sound. Now it was just the two of us.

I realized I might never see Lacey again, and it made me whimper. My mother heard me and lowered her nose to me. Perhaps she knew why I was so upset. We both missed the other puppies (except maybe Heavy Boy), but I did not think Mother Dog understood how I felt about my Lacey.

In a little while, Dad opened the crate up again. He reached in and gently took hold of Mother Dog's collar.

"Come on, honey," he said to her gently. "Someone wants to meet you."

Mother Dog eased to her feet. She looked down at me once and then let Dad tug her out of the crate.

Dad closed the crate door behind her.

I was all alone now.