

# Piper's Story

A  Puppy Tale  
KITTEN

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**W. Bruce Cameron**

Illustrations by  
**Richard Cowdrey**



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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed  
in this novel are either products of the author's imagination  
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PIPER'S STORY

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*Dedicated to William Bode Cameron,  
newest member of the family!*



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# 1



I don't recall being born, although I'm certain it was a joyful occasion, celebrated with great fanfare.

My earliest memory is slightly less delightful.

I was asleep, curled up next to my mother cat, when something rudely stepped on my head. My eyes hadn't opened yet, so I assumed it was one of my littermates foraging for milk.

We were all aware of each other in a general way. As our senses developed, I learned more and more about them. But my initial impression—that they were less graceful than I, always stepping on one another's legs and tails and whiskers—never really changed, even as my vision cleared and I got a good look at them.

They were all mottled grey and white, as were the

areas of my own body that I could see. But on me the effect was gorgeous. On my siblings it just looked disorganized.

We lived with our mother cat in a small metal box. I knew intuitively that these less-than-luxurious accommodations must be a temporary situation. As strength came into my limbs and I could move about, the small, bare, and frankly boring space became less and less tolerable. My littermates might be fine with it, but I was meant to live in splendor, I was sure of it. A mistake had been made.

It was all the fault of the humans who tended us. I thought of them as the Lesser Beings—big, dumb, and slow. Their function was to serve us (and specifically *me*), but they weren't very skilled at it. They treated all of the kittens in the litter as if we were the same.

We might *look* the same, but while I moved through the world with regal grace, my littermates mostly piled on top of one another in an undignified sprawl. My scowl of disapproval at their antics did little to alter their behavior. They were simply unruly—and incapable of changing that.

After a time with the same two humans, new Lesser Beings appeared, a steady flow of them. They would point at me and my siblings and speak their human gibberish and stick their fingers through the little slats in our box. It was very annoying.

And then one day a hand came all the way *into* our

box. I did not like the way that hand smelled. I backed away from it with a silent hiss. The hand wiggled around, eventually zeroing in on one of my sisters, who stood frozen, seeming terrified.

And with good reason. We never saw my sister again.

Not long after, a different hand snatched one of my brothers.

Something was happening, something *terrible*. Up until now I'd assumed the Lesser Beings, while absurdly large and smelly, were basically benign. But now I understood they were *stealing kittens*.

As soon as I comprehended this dreadful situation, I resolved I would fight and bite to the end, but never would I allow myself to be taken.

One by one, my siblings were kidnapped by these frightening, fumbling people-hands. I hid behind Mother Cat each time a fistful of fingers appeared, until I was the sole remaining kitten. My wits had saved me from a horrible fate.

Yet, not long after that, I woke from a nap to see a small human, a girl, standing by our box. She had her hands respectfully pressed against the outside of it, not poking so much as a single finger through the slats.

I had been resolved to meet all hands with claw, hiss, and bite. But I felt that determination melt completely away. For some reason, I was drawn to this girl, even though she was one of the Lessers.

I approached her tentatively. She stood perfectly still and let me sniff her palm, held flat against the slats in a way that did not seem threatening at all.

The scent wafting from her was heavenly. It was a mixture of sweetness and sunshine. Even as it occurred to me this might be a ruse to coax me to be less wary, I couldn't help myself. I closed my eyes and rubbed and purred.

"Mom, look! She likes me!" The girl giggled. Her smile inexplicably cheered me. I pictured nuzzling my nose in her short, dark hair, licking the freckles spread across her cheeks.

The tall, long-haired Lesser with her smiled. "It sure seems like it," she agreed. "They said this one's unfriendly to everybody, but not unfriendly to *you*. Is this the one you want?"

"Yes! I can have her? Really?" the girl squealed.

"I got my first kitten when I was also thirteen," the larger human replied. "Happy birthday, Riley."

When Riley—I would learn that was her name—put her hand into my box, it wasn't scary at all. She didn't grab at me but just laid that hand flat and let me walk into it. Gently, she curled her fingers around my body. I had never purred harder in my life.

I realized then that my siblings hadn't been stolen; they'd simply found their people. And Riley was *my* person, and now we had found each other, just like we were supposed to.



It was a wonderful feeling.

In what I learned was called a car, I sat in Riley's lap and she repeated "Piper Peanut Priscilla Mitzi-Moo Monkey the Marvelous," over and over again—my name, apparently, and well suited to someone like me, who required recognition of my stature. The shorthand version, "Piper," was also used, and I generously tolerated it, though the longer version felt more royal.

After some time the car stopped moving and we got out. Riley carried me up some steps and into a large room with high ceilings. Then she took me on a tour.

I was pleased with my new living arrangements—a spacious dwelling, far more grand than the metal box in which I'd been held. We padded down a hallway with soft carpet underfoot. A blast of foul odor flowed from the first open doorway. "That's Jackson's room," Riley told me. "He's ten. He'll act like you're his cat, too, but you're not—you're mine."

I assumed Riley was informing me that the stinky place was where I might pee, which couldn't make the room smell any *worse*. But I was wrong. On the floor of a different room was a small, low box filled with fresh-scented pebbles of some kind, inviting me to do my business there, when I felt like it.

I knew immediately that this was our room, Riley's and mine, and it was ideal—bright colors; soft, silky bed-coverings; a tall post with rough fabric towering in a

corner (an ideal place to scratch!). It was to this post I went first, extending my impressive claws and ripping with great satisfaction at the material. I didn't protest, though, when Riley scooped me up and set me in the billowing bedspread. Finally, the luxury I deserved!

We cuddled for a moment, but we were both too excited for even a quick nap. I serenely allowed Riley to pick me up once more and to carry me through the house to a bright, vaulted room. "This is the sunroom. We pull the shades when it gets hot. And look, this is the dog door!"

Riley knelt and showed me how a curtain set in the bottom of the door could be brushed aside, allowing the fragrance of the outdoors to waft pleasantly toward my nose. "When you want to go out to the backyard, you just push it!"

It seemed clear she wanted me to pass through the small, curious "dog door," so I did, stepping gingerly out onto a green lawn. A lizard flashed past and I stared at it. Riley knew me so well already that she had brought in live entertainment! I bounded after the tiny thing, but it scuttled into a crack between bricks.

I silently walked with delicate balance through the grass. Riley followed me obediently, and I reflected on all that I'd seen thus far. The metal box of this morning, and even Mother Cat, seemed far away. This was my life, now—life here with Riley and the large Lesser

Beings. My needs would be tended to. There would be scampering lizards to hunt and even an occasional bird flitting overhead. I had known all along I was fated for this, for greatness, and now it was mine.

I purred with contentment, fondly gazing at Riley as she picked me up and held me in her arms. Naturally she wanted to hug me, couldn't get enough of me. Everything was perfect.

And then it all changed.

The first hint of the disaster to come arrived with the loud pounding of feet in the grass and a wave of the stench I remembered from that open doorway in the hallway. I blinked, astonished, as a short boy with unruly light hair and stained clothing ran up to us, grinning at me with a mouth missing teeth.

He thrust a filthy hand at me and my claws slipped out. Riley gripped me and turned away defensively. "Jackson! Cut it out!"

"Did we get a cat?" he asked excitedly.

"No, *we* didn't get a cat. *I* got a cat. For my birthday."

"Cool! Can I hold it?"

"No," Riley responded firmly. "We just came home and I'm showing her around."

"Has Tank seen it yet?"

"Her name is Piper."

"Okay. Piper. Has my dog seen it yet?" the boy pressed.

"*Your* dog?" Riley scoffed. "It's Dad's dog. No, Dad



and Tank are both on a walk. Why aren't you in your room? I thought you were grounded. You're not supposed to leave the house."

"The backyard is the same as the house," the boy argued.

"No, it's not."

"Tank's going to go *nuts* when he sees Piper, I'll bet," the boy boasted. "Canine crazy!"

"Really?" Riley's voice sounded concerned, possibly at the thought that we were spending even a moment speaking with this dreadful person. I gave her my most supportive stare, an unwinking agreement that whoever this creature might be, it was time for him to leave. "Tank's usually so nice."

"Not when it comes to cats," the boy countered. "When it comes to cats, Tank's a *killer*. His kind was bred to hunt them."

"Tank's a rescue. He wasn't 'bred' to do *anything*."

The boy shrugged. "Just saying. Not very smart to have a cat around my dog. And Tank got here first, so, you know, whatever he does to defend his territory can't be helped."

Riley bit her lip. She was tense—I could feel it in her arms. This boy with his dirt and his smells was upsetting both of us.

I wanted to be tolerant—he obviously had some sort of relationship with Riley, my girl, my person. But really,

in the end, some creatures are just best being grabbed by hands and taken away. I gazed at Riley, giving her silent permission to summon one of the Lessers to cart off this boy so we'd be done with him.

The boy brightened, his eyes on the back of the house. "Dad!" he called.

Riley turned, allowing me to see a new development. Striding across the lawn was a solid, tall Lesser Being, a human far too large for comfort, a smile on his face. I noticed his hair was the same dark color as Riley's. The woman I'd already met had lighter hair, and her eyes were lighter as well.

Why anyone would need to grow so big was beyond my comprehension. Yet it wasn't this giant who became the focus of my attention. It was the energetic, bounding, running animal at the huge human's feet.

It was a dog, all teeth and gums and tongue and slobber, and it was coming our way, its eyes on me.

The boy smiled joyfully. "Tank!"