

## Love Comes in Many Forms

*When you open your heart to a feline, your world can only change for the better.*

With eight grown children of her own, twenty grandchildren and a few handfuls of great grandchildren, Betty couldn't have felt more proud. At ninety-four years of age, Betty felt blessed to have been married over seventy years. Being active and social in her community on a daily basis, she and her husband continued to live independently in their quite Ohio cape cod home. Having maintained strong health, Betty and her family had no way of knowing that a day of river boat gambling would bring about a significant and sudden life change.

Just as they had done every day for nearly five years, two furry black tails strolled side by side throughout the long and narrow corridor of the Cincinnati nursing home. Walking gracefully in and out of room after room, the two felines volunteered their time and efforts visiting with residents in return for being given a safe, loving home, plenty of great food and unlimited attention! *What could be better?* The feline duo comforted anyone who requested their assistance (and also those who did not).

Betty was a new resident at the nursing home and was oblivious to the feline duo. After suffering a heart-attack while enjoying an evening of riverboat gambling with friends and family, Betty found herself in what felt like a small college dorm room, with a new roommate included. She was frustrated that she could not return home to be with her husband. She longed to be in the comfort of her own home with the familiar surroundings that had embraced her life for years. Feeling lonely, confused and desperate to leave the facility which she determined was only for those who were counting down their last moments of life, Betty demanded the nurses release her and allow her to drive home.

In no condition to drive, Betty felt restless from her own frustrations and beyond exhausted from her medical ailments. The small bedroom window transformed from black midnight skies giving way to bursting rays of sun. A new day was starting. The nurse thrust back the heavy beige curtains as Betty strained to adjust her eyes to the daylight. Her hand felt soft and a mild vibration seemed to pulsate through her fingers. *It must be the millions of medications.* Betty thought angrily to herself.

Letting out a small chuckle, the nurse neared Betty's bedside. "Looks like the feline duo found a new friend." She glanced down towards Betty's right hand. There sat the two sleek black felines, curled up side by side in Betty's bed. One had positioned herself just under Betty's fingers, the other was pressed right up alongside her stomach. Both cats were relaxed, not seeming to have a care in the world.

"Well...I....Where did...?" Betty stumbled on her words. "I...I must be dreaming. I'm not a fan of cats. You can take them away." She ordered.



The nurse smiled again, this time stroking one of the cats and then placing her hand gently on Betty's forearm. "Miss Betty, the cats live here. They like you." She paused. "I'm not going to take them away. They are just visiting with you, honey." She looked Betty sharply in the eyes. "Do you have a cat at home?"

Betty shook her head, still feeling confused. "We used to have a dog....I've never....I've never had a cat before. I'm not a cat person." She snapped.

"Well, it looks like the cats like you Miss Betty. They're pretty popular around here. They've been here for about five years now. They were rescued from the shelter and they have given nothing but love to everyone who comes here. Give them a chance, I promise they won't bother you." And with that, the nurse sharply hung her chart on the wall and exited.

The days marched on and Betty began to find herself spending more and more time with the so called *feline duo*. Most mornings she would wake up with one or both cats by her side. During the day she would receive several unsolicited visits from both felines. Betty petted them, talked to them and listened closely to their soft purrs. She closely studied the slight tiger stripes in their dark black fur that could only be seen in the brightest rays of sunlight. She found herself beginning to wonder about their personal stories. *How did they end up at the shelter? Did they have names?* Her roommate had previously suffered from a stroke and was unable to speak. No one was around to answer Betty's newly formed questions. The nurses were always in and out and onto the next patient- they seemed to lack the time to respond to her cat questions. *Oh well.* Betty let out a sigh. *I will just call you Cleo, and you I will call Billy. Yep, Cleo and Billy. Purr-fect!* She smiled to herself. A smile was something that had eluded Betty since her entry into the nursing home nearly a week earlier.

When Betty's family members came to visit they began to notice an enormous difference in her demeanor. She no longer seemed angry or bitter about wanting to get home. Betty of course still longed to move back home with her husband, free from the nurses and the small shared room. However, she seemed relaxed and at peace with knowing that she would return home after a short rest at the nursing facility. She exuberated confidence and seemed to have a twinkle in her eyes. Her family couldn't help but wonder what had caused this incredible transformation over the course of just one week. Their curiosity flooded Betty with questions- *Are you meeting a lot of new people? Do you like the food? Are the nurses treating you well? How is your roommate? Have the other family members been visiting often?*

Meanwhile, Cleo and Billy strolled up and down the corridor visiting other residents and holding their tails high in the air as they walked quietly through the building that had become known as their home.

*Do you need anything mom? Would you like me to bring you a few magazines from the grocery store?* The questions continued. Betty, all the while, listened patiently to her children and grandchildren's concerned voices, but thinking only about the feline duo. She wondered who they were visiting, she wondered when they would stop by her room to visit again that day.

"Could you get me a pack of kitty treats?" Betty blurted.

Furrowed eyebrows swept the room full of concerned family members. Betty could tell they all thought she was confused and unsure of what she was asking.

"Could you get a pack of cat treats at the grocery store and bring them to me?" She repeated with a smile.

"Mom, you don't have a cat."



Laughing, Betty grabbed her daughter's hand. "I know honey. But there are two cats who live here- Cleo and Billy. They come to visit me regularly, and they sleep with me at night often. I would like to give them some little treats...I think they would like that."

Six weeks later, Betty was walking down the narrow halls of the nursing facility side by side with her husband and son. Her son carried her large brown suitcase, and her husband held loosely onto her left hand.

"I'm so glad to have you come home dear." Dan gave Betty's hand a small squeeze.

"I've miss you."

"Me too." She replied lovingly.

As her son held open the large glass door for his mother and father to walk through hand in hand, Betty turned. "Wait!" She opened her right hand which contained a few small cat treats. "Here kitty, kitty!" She called softly. The three stood and waited at the glass doors, only to watch nurses and residents walking to and from various rooms throughout the long hall. Betty sighed and turned towards the doors.

"Mom..." her son whispered, directing his eyes back towards the hall.

Cleo and Billy, tails high and entwined, came trotting down the hall, making a beeline for Betty.

A tear came to Betty's eye, but she was quick to wipe it away. Betty handed the treats to her son and nodded towards the feline duo.

As he knelt on the ground to supply the much desired treats, Betty watched with a twinkle in her eyes. "Thank you." She whispered quietly while watching the cats. "Thank you so much."

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